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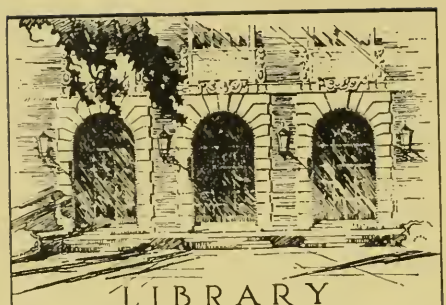
The Cheveley Novels.

A MODERN MINISTER.



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"Her favourite nook, a cavity at the very edge of the cliff."

The Cheveley Novels.

A MODERN MINISTER.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS,
EDINBURGH AND LONDON.
MDCCCLXXVII.

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PREFACE.

CARTOON: depicting the endless combat of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, opposed by the Church. A Poem: of Loves in more subtle grooves. A Comedy: of Life, interwoven with its pathos. A Record: of that eternal marvel, the Soul. An Ideal: of Devotion, in Love and in Friendship. An Anatomy: of Sensitiveness, in its delicate contrasts. And the supremacy of the Good and the Beautiful.

Wrought by a hand reverent of things holy, careful of things innocent, tender with childhood.

The Book has for argument an arena where the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, have full play, and the drama represented is the old epic of the struggle of Good and of Evil. A moral crowns, as a motto commences, the narration, and those who look deep may see the reflection of an Allegory.

A protest likewise, against the failing of modern times—making light of the ministry, and sport of the minister.

There is no royal road to knowledge of one's kind. Though born with the genius, and educated to the finish, it is only deep sympathy with the human, searching insight into motive, careful analysis of action, and that quick gift called observation, that will impart material for a range of broad design, dramatic with incident, and powerful with character.

It is not just to see only the narrow and mean side of life, nor generous to use ability but to satirise. Fine qualities are lifting men Heavenward daily, while the endurance of some women might be the envy of angels.

Those pausing to look on the great human comedy from time to time, see passions surging around and over-flooding the sublime and beautiful, quenching the lovely and the pure; high endeavour and lofty purpose snapped like brittle glass for some gross and tempting delusion, and the weird tyranny of the carnal holding its despotic government; heartlessness everywhere rampant, selfishness the only one creed generally accepted, hollowness at the centre of institutions and social observances; mortals with illimitable powers of splendid effort palsied by low tendencies, sitting amidst the ashes of high aspiration and lofty aims: when the show is thus seen in its livid realism, stripped of its mocking tinsel and florid tapestry, it is suggestive. But with it all there are

facets of exceeding beauty; self-denying devotedness, unwavering friendship, beautiful regard for age; reverence in sacredness; purity, industry, patience; and the very flower of Heaven-truth; these side lights redeem the whole of it—and so long as we discover such, the gigantic panorama is not unrolled for nothing.

In the leading character—the Minister—the author has not aimed at presenting an impossible order of being, admirable beyond imitation, and hence imperfect as an example; on the contrary, the interest of the story depends upon the reverse, for while possessing the noble qualities which justify his selection as the hero of it, he is yet endowed with abundant weakness, and much real humanity.

Of the characters, while some stand for distinct types, others fall into grouping, doing little helpful to the action, but completing the picture; and it is something to stand in the background of a large composition, so one stands well; if the studies are in unity with the scheme of construction their introduction is justifiable.

The children are numerous. Is there any sphere of labour under the sun where it is not so? If such a dreary site exists the author will carefully avoid it. Haydon narrates that when Rogers had looked long at the former's fine painting of "Christ Blessing Little Children," the poet said—"When all the figures in the picture get up to walk away, I beg leave to secure the

little girl in the foreground." "A pretty compliment!" adds Haydon, with *naïve* gratification. Possibly had the incident occurred later the critic might have grumbled — "Too many children by half!" A prisoner after twenty years' confinement gave this as the one bitter lament: "In all that time I did not once set eyes upon anything youthful; I often thought if a child brought me a death-warrant I would accept it gladly but to look on and touch the hand of the child!" This plaint wrung from a human heart indicates a human need—the revivifying influence amongst us of the young; a very unlovely place would this world be without the children. A large significance attaches to Isaiah's words—"And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them." Undertake a voyage to Australia, when there are children on board, and when there are none, the latter time will appear by far the longest. Their innocence has robbed even shipwreck of its cruelty, and strong men have gone down holding to little hands, made courageous and resigned by the contact. Do not take the buds from the garland, or the poetry of the decoration is defaced.

The Book also presents that essentially human characteristic—eccentricity, under a variety of guises; it is one of the qualifications rendering the race interesting; it lends diversity to the dull level of existence, and makes a being remarkable who might not else be noticed. It takes many forms, humourous, pathetic,

startling, sometimes a little disagreeable. Yet we would not be without the eccentric people, the peculiar people, the people whose ways and words we cannot understand, and so seldom take the trouble to look charitably into; much underlies those ways and words could we but see it, many a fiery ordeal passed through, with present suffering, and great shrinking that imparts a bearing often provocative to ridicule or contempt.

In the personification of evil, the antitheton of the Minister, it has been the object to present a flitting, sardonic, spirit of ill; restless and unhappy; of immeasurable talent misdirected; with a touch of the human in his interest for his child; in other respects embodying the vices of intrigue, avarice, and revenge. Like the arch-enemy he is ever at the elbow, to instigate, to tempt, to destroy; his philosophy is that of grim sarcasm; a cool methodical chief of the diabolic bureau, throughout the entire mosaic his cynical discourse and supernatural appearance and disappearance are purposely contrived—without red fire and the accessory of melodrama. A strange blending of patrician and Bohemian birth meets in his iron nature, and the polish acquired of mixing in good society here and there in the capitals, unites to form a striking individuality; with this he possesses the calm, shrewd tact and cautiousness of the thorough man of business, whose connection, monetary and commercial, is extensive, and whose communications web London and

loop-line the country. Hard, haughty, cruel, yet this entry from his private journal having allusion to the Minister proves him not without admiration,—"Either the ministry has made a very weak man strong and a power in the land, or else he has made the ministry of our day nearer the scheme laid down by its divine founder than I have ever before seen in this so-called Christian land."

THE AUTHOR.

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TO

CHARLES CHEVELEY, Esq.:

IN GRATEFUL RECOLLECTION

OF UNVARYING KINDNESS AND SYMPATHY,

I DEDICATE

"A MODERN MINISTER;"

THE INITIAL WORK OF A SERIES

I PROPOSE, WITH YOUR PERMISSION,

TO ENTITLE

THE CHEVELEY NOVELS.

THE AUTHOR.

THE CHARACTERS.

In the Ministry.

The Rev. Westley Garland . .	The Minister.
The Rev. Robert Evelyn . .	His Curates.
The Rev. Spencer Webb . .	
The Rev. William Arden . . .	Pastor of a Village Church in Yorkshire.
Dr. Christopher Cricket . . .	A Nonconformist Divine.
The Rev. Jacob Jones . . .	Of Pisgah Tabernacle.

In the Blue Book.

Lady Helen Lindon	Sovereign in her own Right.
Lady Guilmere	A gracious Gentlewoman.
The Duchess of Mainwaring . .	A Leader of *Ton*.
The Countess of Comdarlington .	A Martyr to Languor.
Hon. Mrs. Frederic Glover . .	Champion of Woman's Rights.
Harold, Lord Lindon . . .	Of Sleperton Manor.
Frank, Lord Ellerby . . .	A Patron of the Fine Arts.
The Duke of Mainwaring . .	Of the "Four-in-hand Club."
The Earl of Comdarlington . .	With Taste for the Antique.
Lord Darrell	Old Red Sandstone Period.
Sir Kinnaird Dalton . . .	A wealthy Baronet.
Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger .	Of Cheffinger.
Sir Horace Vivian	A Victim to the Proprieties.
Sir Charles Neville	The Votary of Fashion.
Beresford Travers, Esq. . . .	Of Beresford Court.
Ernest Bruce, Esq.	A Landed Proprietor.
Elmore Elsynge, Esq. . . .	The Heir to Froggyfond.

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William Arden	Qualifying for the Bar.
George Percival	An Author.
Dr. Nichols	A kind-hearted Medical Man.
Dr. Hunter	The leading Practitioner of Seaborough.
Mr. Penfold	A Solicitor.

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Mr. Herbert Garston	A Hunter of dangerous Game.
Mr. Samuel Percival	A retired Bookseller.
Mr. Jeremiah Grannet	Of Art-ful Tendencies.
J. Arthur Anderson, Esq.	An inveterate Miser.
Rehoboam Gripper, Esq.	A Bank Director.
Geoffrey Hamilton	Of the Bishop's House.

In Boyhood.

Arthur	The gentle Page.
Lorry Vincent	"The Boy with the Lovely Face."
Bertie Evans	Son of a Congregational Minister.

In Girlhood.

Lena St. Aubyn	Princess of the Cliff.
Ella Travers	The Snowflake.
Rose Blake	Sweetest of Southern Roses.
Amy	Fairy Dancer in Spectacle and Ballet.
Violet Hamilton	Bright Spirit of a Bookworm's Retreat.
Constance Evelyn	A young Beauty of Devon.
Edith Lessie	The Daughter of Laïs.

Married Ladies.

Mrs. Joseph Blake	A Lady of infinite Style.
Mrs. Major Howard	Of many accomplishments.
Mrs. Warburton	A famous Actress starring in the Provinces as Kate Vandaleur.
Mrs. Lurch	The Lady with a Brougham.
Mrs. Josiah Bubb	The Silk Mercer's Lady.
Mrs. Ebenezer Wriggle	Of the Fish Sauce Manufactory.
Mrs. Samuel Percival	Of Queen Street, Paddington.
Mrs. Thomas Percival	Of the Warren Farm.

Spinsters.

Aunt Penelope	The Goddesses.
Aunt Hebé	
Aunt Phyllis	
Aunt Minerva	
Aunt Diana	
Aunt Vesta	
Aunt Hermione	
Aunt Circe	
Aunt Dido	
Aunt Lena	
Aunt Thetis	
Aunt Iphigenia	
Aunt Evadne	
Miss Ruth Lessie	A Farmer's Sister.
Miss Turner	A Pew-opener.
Miss Charlotte Caddie	Lady Superior of the Institution of Scandal.
Miss Merino Bobbin	The Lady in need of Protection.
Gabrielle	"An almost ideal Character, but sufficiently human to be interesting."

Ladies about whom there is a Doubt.

Miss Kitty Ticklewich	A Maiden of gushing Pleasantries.
Hortense Brandon	The exceedingly quiet Person.
Mrs. Vincent	An elegant Schemer.
Mrs. Lessie	Erring, but a Mother.
Madame Reignard	Teacher of Deportment.
Mrs. Maneater	Of the Royal Menagerie.

Widows.

Mrs. Lionel Travers	Whose History closely concerns The Minister.
Mrs. Garston	The Relict of a thorough English Gentleman.
Mrs. Evans	A Congregational Minister's Widow.
Mrs. Elsynge	The Mistress of Froggypond Hall.
Mrs. Westwood	Mr. Bruce's Housekeeper.
Mrs. Sanderson	Mr. Garland's Housekeeper in Brighton.
Mrs. Mellerton	Mr. Garland's Housekeeper at Hawkingdean.
Mrs. Robertson	Mr. Garland's Housekeeper in London.
Mrs. Bobbin	Of Bobbin's Drapery Emporium.

In Trade.

Joseph Blake	Chemist and Druggist, Brighton.
Laban Wix	A Pawnbroker.
Thomas Percival	A Hertfordshire Farmer.
John Lessie	A Sussex Yeoman.
Reuben Smith	Miller and Bailiff.
Mr. Simcox	Curator of Seaborough Museum.
Mr. Lurch	Tonic Ale Brewer.
Ebenezer Wriggle	Fish Sauce and Pickle Manufacturer to the Royal Family.
Josiah Bubb	Silk Mercer by Appointment.
Edward Summers	Vendor of Books, Fancy Articles, and Photographs.
Uriah Sticky, Bacchus Bin, Silverside, Panel, Easel — Committee for the Testimonial	Grocer; Wine Merchant; Jeweller; Coach-builder; Artist.

In Bohemia.

Dickson Cheffinger	Not so Mad as he seems.
Andrew Wilson	A Violinist.
Jimmy Ringdom, Billy Tanner	Of Ringdom and Tanner's Hippodrome.
'Walter Gordon'	A Deserter from the Circus.
Boneless Joey of Japan	Likewise of the Amphitheatre.
Major Wellesley Howard	Of uncertain military Antecedents.
Jael-Ishmael	King of the Gipsy Tribes in England.

In Rascality.

Noel Barnard	Surnamed Mephistopheles.
Bartholomew Rolf	The Utility Villain upon a novel Principle.
Stephen Miles	Chief Clerk at the Bank.
Coke O'Connor	Attorney-at-Law.
John Beech	One of the Fancy, and Dealer in Foreign Birds.

In Service.

Simmons	Confidential Servant to Sir Kinnaird Dalton.
Hammond	Sir Kinnaird's Valet.
Williams, Martha Saxe	Faithful Servants at the House upon the Cliff.
Brown	A Yorkshire Fisherman.

A MODERN MINISTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE STORY OPENS IN BRIGHTON.

JOSEPH BLAKE, seated at his desk before a monstrous tome of Latin science, ever and anon directed a keen business glance over the area of his shop, where several fashionably-dressed purchasers were selecting the toilet elegancies and other trifles which add to the attraction of modern chemistry. Taken throughout, perhaps, this shop of Joseph Blake's was one of the handsomest of its kind to be found in Brighton: an eminently genteel shop, which a duchess might have entered, and where the uninviting odour of drugs was indistinguishable beneath a pleasant cloud of essences and perfumes. Nevertheless Joseph Blake possessed a great prestige for the excellence of his medicaments, and the doctors treasured the belief that their prescriptions, carefully prepared under the personal supervision of the proprietor, were here made up with a scrupulous care and excellence deserving of their confidence.

Joseph Blake was highly esteemed in the town, not alone for his business qualities and general integrity, but for a genial, kindly benevolence, and a grace of manner as appreciable in

the man of business as in the peer. But this business was a sore point with Mrs. Blake, who had come of professional people, and had very nice notions about caste. Never was this good lady more put out than when some unfortunate wight chanced to speak of Joseph as a tradesman. "I would have you to know," she would say, "that the chemical profession is not a trade, and that a man must first become a gentleman before he can become a chemist." This generally settled the matter for the natural life of the person convinced. As a point of interest, no one ever presumed to argue with Mrs. Blake upon any subject, it being a principle of that lady's policy never to give in, and to develope the aggressive as she warmed to the argument. They had one child, a little daughter, and of so charming a disposition, it was tacitly admitted by their friends that Nelly Rose was "papa's own child."

Upon the afternoon when the story opens, Mr. Blake was rather more absorbed than usual in the fathoming of the technical *vade-mecum* before him, a prescription of an eminent London physician demanding his instant attention. Lady Guilmere, resident in one of the chief aristocratic squares, had been dangerously ill, until it became imperative to invoke the skill of some great physician. This prescription was the result of that consultation, and Mr. Blake was deep in its direction when a tall, singular-looking personage entered the shop, and, marching past customers and assistants, made straight for the sanctum of the master, slightly to Mr. Blake's annoyance.

"Mr. Blake, I presume?" the tall stranger said, leaning his arms on the glass and mahogany screen to the desk, and peering over at the chemist with the most basilisk-like eyes the latter thought he had ever seen.

"That is my name, sir!" a little irritably, for the chemist, as became one privileged to write *Medicinæ Baccalaureus* and *Societatis Medicæ Londinensis Socius* after plain *Joseph Blake*, especially disliked an interruption of this kind when deep in pharmaceutics.

"Glad to have found you at home, Mr. Blake; proud to make your acquaintance. Any friend or relative of Joshua

Blake commands—will ever command—my undivided regard."

"You know my brother, sir?"

"He is my particular friend. I hold a letter of introduction; permit me, sir—"

The stranger, whom Joseph thought uncommonly like Mephistopheles, handed the chemist a letter.

"My brother was never very choice of acquaintance even when in England, and now he has settled in Australia I suppose he meets with all sorts."

With which innocent remark, not noticing the playful shrugging of the shoulders by the other, Joseph Blake ran his eye down the letter.

Adelaide, S. Australia.

Dear Brother Joseph,

Allow me to commend to the notice of yourself and friends Mr. Noel Barnard, a truly worthy and estimable gentleman, who hails from Perth settlement, Swan River, from whence he brings unexceptionable testimonials. He has been a considerable traveller, and is now bound for Europe; he is very entertaining company. I take occasion to send by him a little case of snakes for your drawing-room, which accept with love, from your affectionate brother—Joshua.

"Have you the case with you, Mr.—Mr. Barnard?"

"At my hotel, sir. The man shall bring it down to you."

"Now, I was going to beg you would not trouble, for I really have no room for curiosities! Pray keep it in remembrance of my brother, who seems to hold you in such particular esteem. And now, how can I serve you? My capacity is very limited, for I am so occupied with business that I get but little out-door recreation."

"No consequence, my dear sir; there is nothing you can do to oblige me, much as I am sure you would wish to do so. But I thought I would give you a look in, as I am here for a day or two. A charming town, sir, does credit to your municipal government!"

Now, this was Joseph's weak point; and, pluming himself, he admitted it did credit to his brother councillors, and

invited the gentleman with Australian credentials into the back parlour, to take a glass of sherry.

With a polite bow to one or two of the customers known to him, Mr. Blake passed through the shop, followed by the grave-looking stranger.

"Very snug, upon my word," rubbing his hands and looking round Mr. Blake's comfortable little retreat.

Then, over sherry, the gentleman from Australia discovered it was Saturday, and "By-the-bye, where do you recommend for a nice quiet service to-morrow? I admire a brilliant preacher. I think the poet what's-his-name says, 'a good man eloquent!' It seems to be the fashion now for everybody to run after this Mr. Garland of yours. How ever did you contrive to secure so bright and shining a light for the provinces?"

"Well, although I've attended at the church since and before Mr. Garland's time, that is more than I can tell you. I have reason to believe this is his first charge, but I am not sure, and I fancy others are content to trouble as little as myself. We are fortunate to obtain so gifted a preacher; we know the nomination to have been correct, we leave the rest."

The gentleman with credentials looked different ways out of the corners of his eyes, and, by way of one corner, saw an assistant approaching, and helped himself to another glass of sherry, permitting the biscuit to crumble slowly into the glass, as though each crumb were a thought, and fishing after these with the major portion as deliberately as though stringent issues weighed upon the sport.

Mr. Blake looked up inquiringly upon the entrance of his assistant.

"Lady Guilmere's servant, sir, to know if the prescription is made up."

"Just say it shall be sent at once. Many people in the shop?"

"Not so many, sir. Mr. Garland has just come in."

"Fortunate," said the gentleman; "I shall be able to take a glance at your celebrity! Er—which college did you say? Went to college myself, perhaps we may have met; it is very interesting renewing old acquaintance—very!"

He thereupon stole a hasty inspection. The chemist rather amused at the possibility of this gaunt and shaggy wanderer having been upon cultivation-par with the elegant and refined Westley Garland.

Now it happened at times to be Mrs. Blake's pleasure to enter the shop much as any other grand lady might, and as she herself was in the habit of doing in towns where unknown, and with much majesty buy a pennyworth of lozenges for her little girl, while leisurely examining the handsome costumes ranged beside her husband's counter. Mrs. Blake thus entered, at the time of the Rev. Mr. Garland's purchase of a box of *eau-de-cologne*, and looking from the counter with nervous abruptness peculiar to him, the preacher found himself confronted by this prepossessing lady and her exceedingly pretty child. His gaze rested but an instant upon the countenance of the mother; upon that of the child it dwelt with an expression of indescribable pain. His back was turned to the red-curtained window of the parlour, his face was towards the sea. A look came over the eyes so sad, its eloquence, without the pleading of that voice which thrilled all hearts, would have moved one to tears. He recovered himself in an instant, and continued the selection of his articles.

Mrs. Blake, seating herself with regal stateliness, looked full at this notable. She had long wished to "catch him out," as she termed it, and now to have this pleasure in their own shop was indeed a red-letter event. To hear the voice that was driving her sex to distraction, at her very elbow, so set the good woman quivering that her husband, had he seen her, would have immediately administered a composing restorative. And what a melodious, yet tenderly-toned voice it was, subdued from the sonorous expression of public utterance. How it thrilled one! Even little Rose looked up winningly in the great man's face, and their eyes met, and Rose ceased her thoughtless prattle, becoming grave, oddly grave for years below their teens; the mourning and hungering look haunted her.

"Your popular divine looks rather pale, Mr. Blake—does not enjoy good rest, perhaps?"

"I think he over-studies, sir. Mr. Garland is an active reformer, and leaves no stone unturned in the execution of his noble purpose. I fear he is working himself to death."

"I suppose he indulges, like the rest of us, in a little medicine now and then—something in the way of opiates, or the wherewith to counteract the nervous shiverings some overtaxed people are troubled with?"

The chemist looked up very much surprised.

"I declare, sir, if you had been in my place you could not have described the symptoms with greater accuracy—"

"I know all about it, bless you. Look what I used to go through at college. Overstrain, sir, overstrain; it's an undue-pressure age, an era of high speed, a—beg pardon, is that a moth on my hat? Great objection to those things—perhaps you'll pass my hat, for I must be going, and I'm delaying you;—so pleased to have seen you—any friend of dear Joshua's,"—and with six grave strides the singular individual walked through the shop, brushed past the professional man's wife, and peered, in passing, under the brim of the Minister's hat; but he, so intent upon other things, took not the remotest notice, did not move even by a respiration; in fact, was as one petrified. Mrs. Blake broke the spell in the slightly prosaic style of, "Let me have another pennyworth of the peppermint lozenges!"

What a good thing it is that there are some of this class of people about; how their rude bluntness often relieves a breathless pain!

Mr. Blake came into the shop, bowing with much deference to the Minister, who gracefully gave his hand to this member of his congregation, the same thereupon introducing his wife and daughter. Mr. Garland appearing visibly moved, the chemist said kindly,—

"I fear you are not very well to-day, sir; take care for the sake of your people; will you step in and rest awhile?"

"If you do not mind, I shall feel pleasure," bowing with appreciation as gracious as it was sincere. Mr. Garland was conducted to their drawing-room, and he took occasion to explain in low and trembling tones to Joseph,—

"The sight of your little girl revived an old sorrow; I have lost one whom she resembles feature for feature. I have suffered much in my time, Mr. Blake."

"I, somehow, thought so."

"And you know how easily wounds may be re-opened; but I have overcome the temporary weakness, and shall always see your girl with strange pleasure; let her come to me and make friends. If you are willing, I shall be more than pleased to see her at my house, I shall think it kind of you!"

This was said so simply, yet with such earnest eagerness, Joseph Blake assented with the utmost cordiality.

"I am sure you are quite welcome to Rose whenever you like to have her; it is very good to take this notice of our child: I beg you will send her home whenever troublesome! Take care not to spoil her, sir, children are so quickly spoiled; but you will excuse me, I have an immediate prescription to prepare. Can you tell me how Lady Guilmere is to-day, sir, if you have called?" Lady Guilmere was one of the most devoted attendants at the fashionable temple in which Westley Garland officiated; a slight flush rose to the pale cheek while he replied,—

"I fear her ladyship is sinking fast!" Upon hearing which the professional man hurriedly left the room, begging Mr. Garland to await his return, and sending Rose in to him immediately. This act the other noticed, although passing no remark;—little deeds are magnified into great favours by the sensitive and the suffering.

Rose was not timid or even hesitative, but, kitten in arms, walked straight up to their pastor, and with delightful ingenuousness offered him her hand.

"And we are to be friends, Rose?"

"I have always hoped you would speak to me some day?"

"May I ask why?"

"Because I felt I should love you. I look for Sunday's coming, and welcome the day as I never used to do; somehow it is not like the same church when you begin to read or preach!"

"Am I so very irreverent?"

"Oh no; but we have been used to such different ministers, dull, and giving one the fidgets—I always went to sleep; but I don't sleep now, the morning does not seem long enough!"

A pleased smile played about the Minister's mouth; it was more grateful flattery than any heard in Brighton. Perhaps he recalled two other pretty lips that had aforetime praised his reading.

Then, suddenly, the smile faded, and his face assumed an expression of pain.

"Noel Barnard here?" he thought. "There is now no safety; recognized by him! I believed my very publicity would prove a safeguard. And that man must cross my path like some despoiling influence; is he destined to dog and betray me unto the end?"

CHAPTER II.

A MINISTER OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND.

The Rev. Westley Garland was called a great preacher; and if wide-spread fame, a wealthy, well-filled church, and praise on all hands be greatness, assuredly the public voice spake truth. His portraits were in North Street and the King's Road, his books in the libraries, his autographs in the first of albums. Somebody had seen him in St. Paul's at a week-day service, and forthwith held to the opinion, manifoldly circulated, that Mr. Garland, although his church was filled solely by his own matchless eloquence, was at heart in sympathy with the High Church party; but then, somebody also had seen him at a children's service in Queen Square Congregational Chapel, and these clashed at the tea-table; a more startling revelation yet coming from a third, who knew to a dead certainty that he had sat all night beside a poor sick woman, who sold shell-boxes on the beach, and was a Roman Catholic; this had to be reconciled with the fact that Mr. Garland's housekeeper had been seen taking a basket of good things to the dwelling of a poor woman who had been in better circumstances, but who—was a Baptist.

To chronicle correctly, of all the clergy who had supplied Brighton tea-tables with gossip, Westley Garland was the most provoking man; he was so mysterious, so handsome, so wealthy, so talented, so unmarried! He gave a Dramatic Reading at the Dome for a charity: the tickets, albeit a guinea, were caught up the day of the advertisement; such a scramble was never known, nor such a reading, and for once in a way ticket-holders admitted they had received more than their guinea's worth.

He was the beau divine of good society, and people swore by

him in circles of culture and refinement; yet, somehow, little children lisped his name, and looked for his coming on their way to school. He puzzled, and worried, and fretted, and moved, and for the comparatively short time he had been in Brighton, he had caused more speculation than any man before him.

They came upon him in such odd places: he had been seen talking with circus people, all amongst grooms and horses; with fishermen, down by the boats near the Old Pier; with ploughers on the broad height of Downland; with the rough crew frequenting a low bowling-saloon; at midnight, using gentle entreaty with the outcast; in startling places, at unseasonable and, as some said, unreasonable times.

But it was very strange: look the girls their hardest, saint-like and devout, over the hymn-books, he seemed as unimpressionable as marble; went straight on with the marvellous eloquence, the grace of thought, the music of language; every attitude and gesture a kingly study, and—a witness of sublime indifference to the blandishments of the sirens. Then they commenced picking him to pieces, were sure there was something wrong, would give anything to learn a little of his past. Where did he come from?—For, although nobody noticed it at the time, all being done in the orthodox fashion, he had sprung up like a mushroom in the midst of them. They recollected the white-haired incumbent's death, and the lank curate's doing duty, and then this handsome fellow preaching once or twice in a gown splendid as a bishop's, and with a sad sweet smile enchanting as Charles the First's; and forthwith the pews entered for the prize. But Abelard was insensible, and Heloise embroidered her offertory bags in vain. Certain it is, no efforts within the limits of decency were wanting to induce Mr. Garland to alter his estate; but he was calmly unconscious of the commotion. His winning, affable smile won many hearts among the elders also, and the tender thrill of his voice fell deep into many souls, who told no word to others of his spell upon their lonely lives.

And it was known that the grasp of his hand was cordial

alike for rich and for poor; there was none of the approved coolness at contact with the unfortunate. So he came to live in the hearts of the poor also; and these stole ashamedly into the free seats and north-pole of the galleries, and, hanging upon his utterance, thought the Word came with sweeter force from his lips than any other's.

The crowd he drew around him knew but his strength; rulers must have no weakness. Yet a face of not more than twelve sea-side summers had power to shake him like a reed. Some called the pathos which at times moved the Church, or the sensitive part of the Church, to tears, Art; when it was the cry wrung from his very soul, and, place and people all forgotten, he was alone with his God.

Mr. Garland was assisted by two curates; one a blonde, seraph-like creature, with mild, indefinite manners, and halting, unpleasant speech. He was there before Mr. Garland came, but the latter could not behave cruelly to any one, although the young man often made him creep in the Communion chair. Garland was a splendid reader, and it naturally grated upon his sensibilities more than upon others'. The second was a pale, thoughtful man, of middle age, with a face lined with traces of old care. He had come to Garland in bad condition, and but one-and-seven-pence in pocket, but with such a weird, pitiful tale! Nobody was any the wiser, and shortly afterwards the gentleman commenced duty at a hundred-and-twenty the year. And be sure he was a gentleman of family and University degree; for Westley Garland was one of the few who kept faith with his God, his fellow, and himself. Great friendship sprang up between these two, —on one side arisen of gratitude and a species of loving reverence rather rare in this world; on the other, the product of interest and sympathy. The card of this last-named curate we present, it was,—

Rev. Spencer Webb.

Having nothing to do with the other young man, we drop him out of the book.

One of the Northamptonshire Webbs, people said, who knew nothing about it,—for the Rev. Spencer was as much connected with the said Webbs as with the White Bears.

One evening, at eight o'clock service, Mr. Garland was sitting within the Communion-rails while the Rev. Spencer read Prayers. Of course, the place was very full, for the popular favourite was expected to preach, and some very nice people, as Nelly Rose put it, were poked into the corner; but even as those who enter the latest often get the high places, so upon this evening the tall man of the chemist's shop, whom the Minister had spoken of as Noel Barnard, was conducted by the worthy pew-opener of that aisle to the Minister's own seat. This was on line with the pulpit, in full view of the altar; where a man sat, stately as one of the old Northern kings, with a statuesque poet-face that might have caused the swart daughters of Israel to crimson to the glow of the cactus, had he been monarch of the troubled soul before whom David stood shoulder to the harp. Thus, when Mr. Garland walked from the enclosure to the pulpit, and, in process of removing his pocket handkerchief from the breast-pocket, dropped a letter on the altar-stairs, that accident was remarked by the said Mr. Barnard, who had his eye on it therefrom, meditating possessing himself of the missive. In this he was forestalled by the same amiable and precise maiden lady whose province and privilege it was to conduct Mr. Garland's admirers to their seats, feeling all the time, and that very honestly, that never one of them entertained as profound regard as did herself for the brilliant orator. So long had she played the somnambulist under his predecessor, this man's rhetoric, like a torrent of flowers, was a revelation, and thrilled the old heart as she had thought it would never more be thrilled in this world.

Now while Miss Turner stood by the door receiving the smiling 'Good-night' of those who knew her, the tall man paused on his way out,—

"What are pews in this church?"

"Guinea the quarter, sir; twelve shillings in the gallery."

"Ah, very good. I must try one or two other positions

before deciding. Don't live altogether in Brighton. Should not be a very regular attendant. Get 'em cheaper, I s'pose, on that 'count. By-bye, are views published of the church? Fine interior,—va-ry!" (looking round with apparent interest.)

"Yes, sir; I've some on sale at my shop, if you like to step round. It's closed. Turner, Preston Terrace. But I'm just going home."

"You are very good. 'Lead on, Macduff!'"

"Margaret Turner, sir, Stationery and Berlin Wools!"

Miss Turner let herself in, and the tall man had to stoop. He remained in the passage, (they had entered at the private door of the little mart, over which a card with APARTMENTS wooed the public to a closer inspection,)—while his conductress procured a light. She then requested him to walk into the sitting-room,—a comfortable, orderly, clean, very-much-anti-macassared chamber, with a fine moonlight view of a back yard and two cats on the wall. Miss Turner laid down half-a-dozen hymn-books she carried, drew down the blind, lighted the gas in the shop, and—

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind stepping this way, if you please, sir?"

The views were in a line under a glass-case; the stranger stooped, dangled a glass, passed along the line with military precision of a Field Marshal, reviewing, and—

"Va-ry fine interior, va-ry!"

Miss Turner waited, blew her nose, tapped with her finger nails on the glass, and adjusted a stray curl. Still the stranger did not attempt to make any purchase.

"By-the-bye, got 'ny portraits of—of—"

"Mr. Garland?"

"Exactly! my friend Garland,—going to call,—pleased to take any commission for you,—catch the old boy at supper!"

And now Noel Barnard waited, for the letter; fish didn't bite!

"Thank you, sir; we never trouble Mr. Garland about business. The curates or churchwardens—"

"Just so,—not to detain you,—don't care much for these

views,—misty rather,—bad light. Got 'ny paper,—note—letter—drop a line—clerical friend?"

Miss Turner did not take it, and with quiet business tact placed a box of assorted writing-paper before the customer, who looked at the quality, shook his head, and held it up to the gas,—

"Thought so; worse than sugar-paper, could ha' swore to th' feel, never buy this fellow's,—pen catches,—got 'ny envelopes?"

Miss Turner brought forth, wondering but patient, as became a pew-opener.

"Not quite the size, you see,—as I fold my note tripoint, the corners get bent in,—these ridiculous things,—show you the kind,—got one in pocket,"—(ferreting,)—"bless my soul, it's gone. Haven't picked up a letter, have ye?"

This was a *coup d'état*, and the steely eyes of the stranger glittered like a trap. The sallow-faced little woman with the bands of grey hair, just pulled a linen cuff straight to the wrist, and quietly replied,—

"Articles found in the church are taken to the vestry. I have not been that side of the counter."

The gentleman took up his gloves and umbrella.

"Can't tell you how sorry I am that you haven't what I want,—be a better customer another time. All in the way of business, you know. Thanks, thanks! I'll find the door."

He was gone. Just as quietly and patiently she replaced the boxes; a still smile, little more than the flicker of a rush-light, playing at the corners of the dried-up mouth.

"He saw that dropped," she said to herself, and took the letter from her pocket. She turned out the gas in the shop, and kissed the letter in the dark; then went into the little room, all amongst the anti-macassars, and carefully, lovingly, reverently, placed it in her work-box; not, mark you, with ulterior intention of ever reading it. It was a foolish dream,—a foolish old, faithful heart. She had something now, more than the haunting recollection of the face,—something once his, carried about below the faultless cravat, and she tripped down to see about supper, returning shortly with quite a chirp, and a

cheerful look at the dry bit of cheese; and then,—must take one more kiss as a sort of grace,—and daintily, lingeringly, as prolonging the pleasure, lifting the lid of the old mother's work-box, to drop it like a guillotine severing the thread of her little dream. The letter had disappeared!

"He has been back," muttered Miss Turner with a sardonic composure, scalping a corner of the fossil cheese; "I should much wonder if that party's principles are founded upon the Prayer-Book; mayhap he belongs to the Dissenters. I shall know him next time he comes to ours! Anyway, I think Mr. Garland should be told of this. I'll put on my bonnet again, and call at Mr. Webb's."

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE THAT WAS BOARDED ROUND.

It was built high upon a Yorkshire cliff, open to the expanse of German ocean; sea-gulls alone disturbed its privacy and stared in at the windows with wondering eyes, so tried by storms the deathly quiet of the place confused their reckoning altogether; it stood bared to wind and weather, but solid as the rock upon which the owner had erected his lonesome castle. It was grand to hear the winds sweep through the shrubberies at night, and beset the craggy wall as though an army of demons were scaling it with the lightning at their flanks.

At the best this island is a small plot, but there are queer sites about it upon which to build houses. This builder seemed to have chosen the most unlikely. It had its uses however, as many a northern fisherman knew, when on dark nights of storm the strange man had all the windows a-glow with waxen tapers, till the mansion shone for leagues like a beacon.

From the shore—the sea line—the house was inaccessible; at the back a devious bramble-enclustered pathway which only the initiated would ever have traced, conducted to the strong iron door giving ingress to the boarded court-yard and gardens. The house was built on the brink of the cliff, the boundary encircled the whole of the steep *plateau*. Where on earth the men had come from, or how brought their materials for building the place, was more than anybody could say; no one had seen it in process of construction, but suddenly a Filey mariner noticed the thing—a habitation, chimney, gable, tower, spring-

ing from amongst the dusky trees, and he told his mates, shoresmen of Flamborough, Bridlington, Whitby, Saltburn, and Redcar; they in time saw the house and wondered, saw the birds hovering the dizzy depths and the drapery of flowers trailing from summit to basement. They became used to it: some singular and lonely man retreated from the world that had used him unkindly, perhaps;—and by night when the red and yellow gleam was on their waters it became companionable, and they grew to bless its sentinel break of the long, dark line.

The house on the cliff was tenanted by one Ashton St. Aubyn, Gentleman; of high lineage and refined tastes, but with a singular antipathy to society, either of his order or of the humbler classes. Something of a poet, more of an artist, he lived a strangely peaceful and ideal life, his young daughter his sole companion, if we except a favourite hound. From the extraordinary care taken in enclosing his domain it would seem he anticipated the intrusion which he shunned,—a groundless fear, for no living soul had disturbed the serenity of the house on the cliff.

It was a small establishment: St. Aubyn; Lena; Mrs. Brandon, her governante and companion; Jordan, a maid; Martha Saxe, cook and housekeeper; St. Aubyn's man, Williams; and a domestic.

Lena St. Aubyn was a beauty of fifteen, with a purely classical face, aristocratic in the region of the mouth, with a certain haughtiness derived of her race, yet withal ever lovable-looking, gentle, and delicate: so delicate, the veins mapped the snowy skin, and the fall of a rose-bud would crimson the shoulders. Vivacious, *ingénue*, girlish as when little frocks bobbed the pretty knees, this companion of the lonely student seemed the flower of the home, the sunshine in that castle on the crags; princess too she was,—woe betide the servitor that dare dispute her word! It was a pleasant sight, the sportive girl graceful as some antelope, haunting that wilderness of garden, or reading below the shadow of the trees that grew thick as in African jungles, as solitary, as desolate. Birds came to the crumbs she scattered, conies trooped to her

feet, the wild goat browsed in her path, sheep of the rock came nibbling to the fence and paused, sleepily listening to the *chanson* trilled from her seat near the briar-wood and honeysuckle.

It is a rare thing to see a face you feel would love you as you would love it; yet this was the face that had grown with the flowers of that garden above the sea.

Sometimes when on the grass at the cliff's edge—she delighted in this dangerous vantage-point when she could escape espionage—she would trail to the brink like some swart girl of the red-skins, lean a graceful head over until the sweep of hair became woven with weed, and watch the breakers at wild play below. Wheeling birds would look in the eyes, like windows, where they saw the clouds again, "the deep, unutterable eyes with down-falling eyelids, full of dreams and slumber," and think them precious stones perchance, or stars.

And in a sumptuous chamber where tawny leathers and dead graven gold, old paintings, leopard skins, and massive ebony and silver, blended in Roman splendour; there St. Aubyn passed the sultry summer noon; his hundred treasures displayed to charm the world-sated, beauty-wearied eyes that knew but a pleasure of all life's pageant—his daughter's company. Not any one in England had known her mother. He had come from Eastern lands. A lady who had advertised in the *Times* received reply to meet a gentleman at Hatchett's, Dover Street. Willing, suave, amiable, motherly, clever, she seemed the person he required to take partial care of his young—very young daughter; but this important member of the house did not immediately appear, indeed not until the house on the cliff was in order, and master and governante there domiciled. Lena was a curious little kitten at that day; all frolics and quaintly pretty ways that would creep into one's heart whether one would or no. Over floors of the big rooms pattered the small feet, music that lessened with years, grew grave, sobered, serene; confined to tracks of the garden under breath of the mighty winds that scattered the bloom and foam, and beat the broad wings of birds athwart the rugged ledges of the rock.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. BRANDON.

Mrs. Brandon, a widow lady of mature years, quiet-mannered, composed; with jet-black brows, and the darkest of dark eyes that pierced to the soul; with a soft, panther-like step, and a tact that demolished repugnance at the feline properties native and natural,—Mrs. Brandon had been nine years in the house, and without a difference of opinion, without a shadow of unpleasantness between herself and young charge, or even with St. Aubyn himself. That gentleman thought of Mrs. Brandon as of a useful and highly estimable person, genteel, respectable, accomplished; in fact a treasure if only for that excellent virtue of never raising her voice above a tranquil, lady-like tone, and at all times retaining her admirable self-possession; worry how pupil might, or go wrong as things sometimes would.

One or two quailed before the hard, keen gaze, when the quiet woman chose to read; Martha Saxe always fidgetted beneath it; even Ashton St. Aubyn at times grew uncomfortable. So very quiet; so very good-mannered; so very deep.

Mrs. Brandon was neatly dressed in black silk, some soft cord without rustle; a cap also of rich, old-fashioned lace, not worn coquettishly, but the black, glossy hair was thin at the parting and the cap came in for decorum. Narrow tuckers at the throat and wrist; a Whitby brooch, a hair guard, a tiny watch, and a locket containing some dead sorrow. This is the inventory of a person of remarkable character, of slumbering passion held in leash; with a hand of iron encased in velvet.

One day looking up from his book, moved by the guardian

presentiment that shapes our fears, St. Aubyn found the stealthy watch upon him; she was at some mechanical work, finger and thumb and needle plying the restless little routine of their craft; but he had felt the chill of her serpent eyes, and his started from the page, dimly conscious of an unpleasant creeping, as though a reptile were let loose in his vest. Detected, she arose tranquilly and walked to the window near which he was sitting, closing it with that gentleness of action which disarms resentment; and saying with thoughtful dignity, "I fear you will take cold, these moist winds are treacherous."

Mr. St. Aubyn merely inclined his head and continued his reading, but the look haunted him.

"Where is Lena?" he asked abruptly.

"Trying to make attar with the old rose leaves!" answered the lady, dryly, resuming her work.

"Go and find her, Ponto! Good dog!"

The animal marched gravely off, Mrs. Brandon's lip curling a shade annoyedly.

The dog returned, hem of Miss Lena's dress between his teeth: that lovely truant entered all flushed with chemistry and best blood of her roses.

"Oh, Pa, dear, I've three bottles full, but I hadn't any corks and I've cut the liqueurs; don't mind, do you, darling?"

Round his neck went the arms, down into his soul went her loving culprit glances; and he, old magistrate, could but smile forgiveness while playfully shaking his head at the naughtiness.

Mrs. Brandon retired. To her own private chamber, lofty, richly furnished as the remainder of that house; and here sank upon an ottoman, a shade of great weariness crossing her face, which for an instant was haggard and wan. She seemed another being under pressure of that care, whatever it might be. With grim irony her teeth met, a smile flickered, then she dallied with the locket appended to her chain; she opened this, and there, a long, hard, saturnine face; the face that confounded poor Miss Turner, the Minister's pew-opener.

CHAPTER V.

PICCADILLY.

A BREAKFAST-ROOM, overlooking the Park: shaded by blinds and creepers; coolly elegant, chintz, lace, gilding, a delicately-pencilled paper, some water-colours in quiet hues with trellis frames, a cream-coloured carpet with tiny sprigs of fern, the furniture maple and black, the magnificent mirror also framed in black carving. Unobtrusive taste on all sides.

Sir Kinnaird Dalton, the owner of the house, had partaken of breakfast; he sat by the window, a sheet of the *Times* crumpled in his hand, a small, delicate, thin hand; he had a small, delicate, thin face, a sensitive face, which light hair parted at the centre, falling over the shoulders behind, reminded of Milton in his younger days; the eyes were clear blue, honest-speaking eyes that never lied; the skin fair and pink to the clean-shaven chin; the dark purple dressing-gown open at the throat bared a snowy skin; the fine linen beneath was confined by diamonds. Two little feet, encased in dainty slippers of purple, the work of his mother, were easily rested on an ottoman a servant had wheeled to the window, thoughtfully mindful of his beloved master's comfort. Sir Kinnaird Dalton was not young, but the dazzling lightness, which resembled a halo, conferred artificial youth. He had been waiting longer for the Secretary's attendance than seemed consistent; a shade crossed the mirror.

"Did you not tell Mr. Barnard I was waiting, Simmons?"

"I did, Sir Kinnaird!" The faithful fellow hesitated, and was conspicuously troubled.

"What is it, tell me?"

"Mr. Barnard said he would wait upon you when he had breakfasted; and he has just sent to Covent Garden for some mushrooms, concerning the cooking of which he has been lecturing M. Artaud this twenty minutes!" And with a look of unspeakable commiseration Simmons placed perfumes, the last novel, a tiny vase of lilies, and a few strawberries upon a malachite table beside his master.

Sir Kinnaird seemed pained, but was too well bred to betray further annoyance before the man.

Simmons retired backward, closed the door with a gentleness suggestive of a sick-chamber, and hurried to the hall. Sir Kinnaird was hearty as a chamois-hunter, but Simmons imagined the insolence, as he termed it, of that upstart Secretary must exercise a prostrating effect upon his paragon-tempered master, from whose lips he had never heard a harsh word.

When his servant had gone, Sir Kinnaird arose from the indolent attitude, stood at his height, hands clasped behind, and looked forth beyond the flowers, beyond the patrician thoroughfare; over to where the scorched, charred grass formed the arena for a posse of unkempt children. His thoughts were not with these. "How long, how long," he murmured, "is this humiliation to continue? Before my own servants even, insult upon insult, and I have not the power to crush this serpent. Ah, my fair lady mother, bitter, most bitter is the endurance for your good name!"

He lounged to the opposite window; it opened to the garden at the back, where cunning gardeners had made the best of the limited area: in the window a large glass case of fish and water-weed kept the recess cool and shady by its deadened light.

"I shall be so glad to get away from town, and if I can secure this Devonshire estate Barnard tells me is in the market, I can there live quietly and more happily than here or in Paris. I dread meeting the eyes of people I know, lest they notice this galling espionage; I am afraid one of these times I shall do the fellow some mischief. I wonder as it is I can control

my old Oxford pluck; fortunately for the interests of decency and order, his cold, sarcastic eye always freezes me to the backbone, and puts a highly proper quencher on my warmth. Such very bad form, quarrelling with one's secretary; horrible!"

With the same *insouciant* grace Sir Kinnaird Dalton lounged back, shrugging his shoulders; resumed his restful position; drew a web-like handkerchief over his delicate waxen face, for there was a fly somewhere buzzing about; and went quietly off to sleep, twitching every now and then with memory of his unpleasant factotum. A shaft of gleaming light stole through joining of the blinds straight to the tossed curls, as partial to alliance with the radiant things. Simmons came softly in, discovered the peaceful state of his master, gently drew the curtain lest the light in travelling should fall athwart the eyelids, smiling affectionately all the time, and receded as softly.

Crossing the hall he met with Hammond, Sir Kinnaird's valet. This worthy had evidently something to communicate; he signalled to Simmons to accompany him to the housekeeper's room; that lady being absent upon a shopping expedition. Hammond mysteriously closed the door, pulled down his waistcoat, elevated a tuft, and asked, in deeply sympathetic tones,—

"How is our poor master, Mr. Simmons?"

"Well, as you ask me, Mr. Hammond, he's very poorly indeed; dear Sir Kinnaird's quite overcome; gone off, in fact."

"Not fainted?" (aghast). "And yet I'd be surprised at nothing."

"Asleep, Mr. Hammond; but it's the sleep of the suffering."

"I wish Sir Kinnaird 'ud give us a fiver to do the deed. I'd pay for a halter out o' my share, and dig a hole in the back garding; but Mr. Secretary's got others interested in his welfare 'sides us. What d'ye think? Walking out with Maria last evening, I fancied a young chap was a-following. Now, there's nothink more ungentlemanlike; and just by Marble Arch I turned sharp, and politely asked, 'What are you sneaking after, young man?'

"'One word with you, my good fellow,' he said hurriedly.

"'I ain't a good fellow,' I answered, just as hurriedly, for

Maria was waiting, and you know how the lower orders crowd at that corner—'leastways not after eight o'clock.'

"'I think you come from Sir Kinnaird Dalton's?'

"'I think I do!'

"'Well, I can put you in the way of earning a ten-pound note with very little trouble to yourself.'

"'Live and learn!' I answered; for I hold the best of us can't know any too much. Then he proceeded to open the little business. He wants a close watch kept on this Secretary, and is prepared to pay handsomely for any reliable bits of information, or whatever else we can hand over."

"'Tisn't the sort of business I'd care to have anything to do with. Best keep clear, too, of Mr. Noel Barnard."

"But if it assists Sir Kinnaird, Mr. Simmons?" put the wily valet.

"That certainly makes a difference."

"I'm to meet him a week hence, at the same place."

"It's always been a riddle to me what our master could have been thinking of when he took up with this Mr. Barnard."

"I suspect there's more in that, as in everything else as goes on upstairs, than gentlemen of our propriety can understand. Ah! Mr. Simmons, it's a hollow world, and if it wasn't really to oblige the family, one like myself couldn't stand it." And, so saying, the fine creature drew himself very erect. He had lived with a duke (he called it a juke), and baronets were very small game after that; even when possessed of Adonis curls and a throat that turned the statuettes paler with envy.

Full of his mission, Hammond walked quietly up the grand staircase until, Mr. Barnard's private chamber reached, he, with considerable effort, lowered his eye until upon a level with the key-hole.

CHAPTER VI.

MEPHISTOPHELES.

Piccadilly could scarcely contain a more complete contrast than that house afforded in those two men; the listless, elegant Dalton, and his massive, stolid, sardonic Secretary.

Cold, grey eyes, a hard, long face, an inflexible mouth, and teeth that used to meet with an ominous click; livid features, telling of considerable suffering, or study, or hardship, or what not that lines a face; all was hard, cold, cruel, yet withal intellectual. One glance convinced the observer this was no ordinary man, no vulgar, scheming genius of the Bohemian adventurer type; no rude dabbler in intrigue and craft; but a clever, learned diplomatist, as free of grossness as of ignorance, with extraordinary control and suppression; a contour of head whereon caution balanced skill, and a cast of expression which realized the conception of Nero that once set the patrons of the *salon* all agog with wonderment.

Mr. Barnard was writing; but, as moved by a sudden thought, arose and opened the door, the receding back of Mr. Hammond in view.

"Hammond!" The man paused. "One word." And the gentleman returned to his seat at the desk, a curious contrivance, made from his description.

Mr. Hammond entered, and puffed his breast pigeon-fashion, and as suggesting, "Well, after all, you're not my master!"

"Be seated, Hammond,—want a word with you."

"Thank ye, sir, I never sits in the presence of my betters;" and Hammond looked dryly unconscious of the sarcasm. It

was noticed by the Secretary, who, however, possessed the useful faculty of never appearing to take or to notice anything.

"Hammond," pursued the other, in a tone partly didactic, partly solemn, "I shall be sorry to send a bullet through that door,—spoils the varnish, makes a devil of a mess,—but if you will, you know,—however, that is not the point. Going down to housekeeper's room just now, to see what on earth the people are up to with my mushrooms, I overheard your interesting gossip with Simmons. Don't think I was listening, my good fellow,—pay somebody a ten-pound note to do that for me,—but it was unavoidable. Now, I'm not put out about this, Hammond; every dog keeps to his scent: but I blame you very much for not asking more; each pound will improve that hotel you've an eye upon. Now, all in the way of business, may I offer you twenty pounds to give this enterprising stranger the information I've jotted upon this paper; and to follow *him* up, at the distance, you understand, bringing me faithful word without making any one the wiser. A clear thirty pounds, Mr. Hammond, eh?"

This was not said pressingly, or as of any consequence beyond being all in the way of business; the speaker coolly docketing memoranda and pigeon-holing notes. He did, certainly, look up once, but it was the look a great banker might bestow upon a small depositor considerably overdrawn.

"I shall be proud to serve you, Mr. Barnard. You put it in the domestic way, and I'm not sure, when one goes in for this work, but the more one does the better for one's self!"

"You will yet be an honour to your country, Mr. Hammond," (still methodically arranging his papers). "Now walk down to the culinary department, present my duty to that gourmand Artaud, and say if my breakfast be not served within ten minutes I shall be under the necessity of advising his earliest discharge. You understand me? Ah! close the door softly, please. Thanks!"

The man went forth in a daze. Mr. Barnard looked through the morning letters. Punctual to time his repast was served. A light eater, although an epicure, he quickly left the table,

changed dressing-gown for morning coat, and entered the pretty breakfast-room where Sir Kinnaird Dalton still slept over his morning supplement.

Mr. Barnard stood before the idle exquisite with a curious expression, and marked the small red mouth parting for a word. It fell :—

"Serpent!"

The Secretary pushed a gilded footstool deftly with his foot, and awakened the sleeper without apparent effort of his own.

"Bless my soul! I've been to sleep. Would you remove that fly from the cream? That's the worst of a fellow going to sleep; something sure to go wrong. Glad you have come; want to talk about that place you were telling me of. Private sale, I think?"

"Private."

"Torquay, if my memory serves me aright?"

"Torquay; pleasant property; Eagle Hall; do you know it?"

"What, Lionel Travers's place?"

"The same."

"Never so astonished in my life. What is the cause? We were at Oxford together. I take an interest in poor old Lionel,—cleverest, nicest fellow of the University."

"Little gay, wasn't he? Fond of cards?"

"Not in the least; quietest fellow out; went into the Church,—stay! He didn't go into the Church, through that marriage with Beresford Travers's niece."

"Ward, you mean."

"Beg pardon, I never can get over relationships; it *was* his ward. Awfully pretty, I remember; used to see her in the Park, perched up by the side of old Travers, proud as a turkey-cock. Rather good, that tutor of Lionel's falling in love with the girl,—got kicked out, I fancy,—heard something of the sort."

"Unpleasant, if the person happened to be a gentleman." Said with such caustic dryness, Sir Kinnaird shivered ever so slightly.

"Well, that girl was a sacred trust, and Beresford fully intended, I believe, to marry her himself. It's certain he loved her with more than a guardian's love; and no wonder,

seeing she had grown up under his careful nurture, and had no equal for either grace or beauty. Ah! Lionel and Ella were well matched." And exhausted by so long a speech thus early in the morning, Sir Kinnaird sank back with, "Kindly pass me that cushion; perhaps you'd place it at my back?"

A pause, Mr. Barnard looking from the window. Sir Kinnaird presently remembers,—

"But you were going to tell me how this occurred,—the Eagle Hall estate. What does Lionel want to sell for?"

"Your friend, Mr. Lionel Travers, is dead; suicide, it is thought. You are probably aware he was ruined,—went for a hundred thousand."

"What a blow for Beresford! Although he never spoke to or saw his son after that affair about Ella, he loved him beyond forgetfulness. A crotchety, proud old fellow, he would keep to his word, whatever it cost him. He swore he'd never see him again in this world, and he never did. I am sorry for the lovely widow and their child,—they had a child. Whatever will become of them both?"

"Starved!" The doom was pronounced with hideous vindictiveness.

"Amiable as ever, Mr. Barnard!" And with intense disgust, Sir Kinnaird, plucking a camellia to pieces, blew the petals one by one from the window.

"I have particular cause to be amiable in this instance. I don't often undertake to enlighten your pin-head, dear Sir Kinnaird; permit me to deviate from a custom of reserve habitual and characteristic. The tutor you did me the honour to remember a few minutes since happened to be your devoted servant. Mr. Lionel himself administered that undignified remonstrance; upon the appeal of the lady, who declared herself to have been insulted. He would listen to no explanation; and that fine old English gentleman, his father, had the dogs unloosed on that retreat of ignominy. I had time to forewarn the squire of the loss I knew inevitable; to prophesy to Lionel ruin, disgrace. Well, Sir Kinnaird, my words have come true. It was *I* who brought about the trouble you com-

miserate so deeply. This is the last night his wife and child will remain in their stately mansion, where at this moment they have a mattress, and a broken pitcher, and two or three empty teacups; for everything, even to the child's wearing apparel, was seized by the one creditor,—myself! I bought up the debts; the estate didn't cover; it was of no consequence, and Widow Travers turns out to-morrow. That is all, Sir Kinnaird, except that *you* purchase the estate of its present owner, and enter into possession forthwith. Your cheque-book!"

It had all been said without raising of the voice above the cold, cruel, Jeffreys tone. The book was handed with the curtness of a merchant's clerk.

"If I purchase the estate, Mr. Barnard, it will not be at your bidding; but with the view of proving a friend to the wife and child of the man I loved, even as a brother!"

Mr. Barnard smiled grimly at that; but contented himself with opening the book at the current leaf; placing a tiny piece of glass and silver elegance between the perfume, lilies, and strawberries, and a dainty ivory pen in attendance. Sir Kinnaird was very fastidious, with all his good sense; his innumerable properties must be the pink of perfection; an ordinary wooden holder would have dismayed him; therefore the Secretary even walked the extreme length of the velvet pile, to procure that slender piece of work for the wealthy baronet.

CHAPTER VII.

SEABOROUGH IN THE SEASON.

A BRIGHT little town, with a white face ever smiling, when the setting sun fell athwart its trim terraces especially, as it was doing at the time the evening train arrived from London. Rather a crowded train, for Seaborough was visited by many during the season—laying claim to being a popular place; and those who did come came in a legion. The first-class carriages were not over full, perhaps, but the second and third were freely patronized. Bustling about with violence, and that constituent the unkind call fussiness, a lady of very prepossessing appearance was worrying every porter she saw, concerning a black bonnet-box which had not turned up, and which she declared should be found if the engine coal-hole was emptied! With her, little Rose, all uneasy and flushed by her mother's eccentricities, and looking prettily embarrassed with every one gazing so admiringly at her. Mrs. Blake came here because unknown, because no tip-top people ever came; and, being a lady of infinite style, she could walk here with queenly dignity as the Duchess of So-and-So did the King's Road, Brighton, much to the envy of this good lady. Apartments in the Crescent had been retained by letter; they had been to the same house for years; and as soon as that bonnet-box came to light the twenty-seven packages piled on the fly would move on to that commodious haven. The season had commenced, this was the pioneer rush, and everybody looked anticipatory. Big waves and duckings, sea-weed collecting and shell-finding, sands, minstrelsy, and delights of all sorts, were reflected in the sparkling, eager eyes. These did

"An old man coming along was moved to address the stranger, he looked so forlorn and poorly."

not wait upon the platform, while Mrs. Blake was poking at the engine's internals with her umbrella, Rose imploring, porters explaining, the station-master remonstrating, but they jogged sturdily down the hill that led to the beach.

The crowd had scattered; last of them all was seen a pale-faced, slender youth, who with difficulty dragged himself along; delicate certainly, and no doubt suffering; a wan, colourless face all pinched and haggard, but still fair to look upon; flashing eyes, with quick, restless movement, as ever on the alert for ill; a convulsive clutching with the wasted hands, and that slow, toiling progress so indicative of weariness.

The red glare on squares and rounds of glass, on the slope of conservatories, on the gilded vane of the new church, on the flint of the tower of the old, on the slant blue slates, on the white façade of the Athenæum and Assembly Rooms, on the bronze dolphin central of the genteel square; upon all the face of the nestling little town between hills, the red glare of the sunset. And it seemed a mocking sort of light after all to our traveller, who leaned resting against a wall at the corner where roads divided, one leading downwards the route to the new town, the genteel residences, the clean, bright lines of shops, the parade, the pier, the esplanade, the sands, and the Congregational church; whilst the road that stretched away up the higher ground, conducted to the old town; the colony of quaint, red-bricked, gabled dwellings that were good enough for the fathers; the rows of odd little shops, the old well, the blacksmith's forge and the wheelwright's; Dr. Poppinton's school, a dreary, large, ivy-covered building of historical date; and the venerable church with its massive tower, standing like a bulwark of the faith, serenely unconscious of its symmetrical rival below-town. The youth rested hesitating, and watching the gradually lessening glow upon the picture. An old man coming along was moved to address the stranger, he looked so forlorn and poorly.

"Bee'st unwell, laddy?" wiping his forehead, looking kindly and father-like on the youth.

"I have been very ill, my friend. I am better now, thank God! London's a sorry place for the sick and poor!"

"Ay, truly is it! My poor lad went yonder, thought he'd do; worked hard at his trade too, he did, but he fell faint one summer, wasn't up to the mark at his time of a mornin', took to his bed later, but wouldn't let the woman know my address, didn't want to disturb me. So he died, and I all the time waiting through the summer and the autumn for his letter; all the flowers on his favourite trees blossomed and fell and it never came; and in snow time I had saved enough for the journey and went to the woman where he'd lodged, and she just told me on the doorstep, never so much as asking me on the mat, how my boy had fallen low and got in arrears, and grown worser and worser, too low to eat; and how she'd ended matters by turning him out to die in somebody else's room. I could learn no more, but I could guess the rest. Yes, it's a sorry place, laddy; I'm glad for your father's heart you're out of it."

"I have no father, nor mother, old friend; it is as well, perhaps, as I should be slight comfort."

The old man shook his head.

"I do assure ye, I often feel as if, had I the very worst lad as was ever given up, I could rest content; but to be growing old with never a bit of kith nor kin to meet yer eyes sometimes, it's that's so hard. I seem to want it more now, I'm feebler like!"

"I am quite as lonely—I am—friendless; you at least have neighbours whose kindly greeting meets your own, in whose eyes you daily see a little interest—I am without even that!"

It was said so desolately, the old man's features softened, and his voice trembled.

"Come, come, and so young; you should be all hope! What hast come here for, if it be not too bold a question?"

"I have heard there is some one staying here whom I would see unseen; helped by his hand already, that hand would raise me if I came in its way; yes, I must see him once again."

"Ay! laddy, thou'rt so gentle, it seems none could help being a friend to thee."

"Could I afford the time to tell my story, father, 'twould wring as many tears from you as I should shed. You've not

lived to this honoured age but to find the strange, tragic tale in many a life truly told. I want cheap lodgings while here; can you advise me where to seek them? I was pausing as usual between two roads."

"This one leads to Old Town, where rooms are cheaper than below, but half-a-mile on is Sleperton village, and if ye could do with cottage comfort it's cheaper still."

"Thanks, many thanks, that would suit me quite as well; my means are small, unfortunately!"

"Ay, we ain't all blessed alike in the pocket! See some o' the grand folk down there a-walking, showing o' their feathers? You can go an' see 'em now, band's a playing; I could tell 'em same Lord made us all! Oh, it's a grand place is Seaborough New Town, but give me the old place up among the trees where the good folks lie buried, and none o' them black-faced singers with banjoes comes a-disturbing of their rest. Maybe you'll feel interested in Sleperton—dost care for mysteries and such-like baubles?"

The youth smiled, the question was so quaint.

"Not much, why?"

"The great house on the Green will interest you; full in your view, there are cottages all round the Green; a sight o' people goes from Seaborough New Town to see the old Hall."

"But what is it—a ruin?"

"Oh no, not yet, but soon will be, I trow. It has a story to it; not that there's any truth in it, I daresay, but we poor old country folk must have our bit o' gossip." And smiling kindly, the old man made for continuing his way, and Walter Gordon was again alone. The little chat had refreshed his spirits. All seemed so quiet and peaceful after the London turmoil, so sweet and fresh after the murky heat of the City, he already felt revived. Sleperton presently; meantime he would reconnoitre.

Taking the downward road, passing in succession a public-house, a line of pretty dwellings, and a farm-yard; a shed whereon were pasted announcements of a flower-show, a lecture, and a theatrical entertainment, sales of stock and plant, and a

selling-off of drapery: then coming to a stretch of market-garden, where the herbs and flowers sent forth an evening incense so grateful, the youth paused, leaned upon the fence, and enjoyed the cool, fresh fragrance. The glow had died to a grey, and the town was putting on its quiet evening shade. More people; the shops had closed, and they of commerce had strolled out after work, man and maid, taking the country way; they stared hard at Walter till he blushed again. It was the custom to stare at strangers in this quiet town, and a stranger of appearance like to this was not seen every evening. Past the church, still down hill, then three or four detached dwellings of a better sort. One of them was entitled Sea-view Villa, although to catch the sea view you would have to climb the chimney. Then past the sexton's, "APARTMENTS" in one window, and "PARTIES DECENTLY INTERRED" in the other; a small store for general ware; a private house, set back in a ghastly garden where shingle seemed at bowls with oyster-shells, and marigolds had spread like the measles; a low-pitched place with stables in the rear: innumerable dogs at amateur coursing to the rout of quiet-minded fowls enjoying the strut before roost: "VETERINARY SURGEON" was on the gate, and an ancient and tan-like smell redolent everywhere. Next came a baker's; in the window a rakish-looking roll, a half-quartern or two, some bags of flour on drill, three bottles of sweets, dead flies, a black-beetle, suspicious-looking cakes with red things stuck therein, tartlets of apparently primeval origin, stale biscuits, and other confectionery; and then—a young ladies' seminary with "SEABOROUGH ACADEMY" in large letters on a brass plate, this was the school that discomposed Dr. Poppinton's young gentlemen;—and next to this a corn, hay, seed, and coal merchant's office. Here commenced the roadways proper of the town; that is to say, the water-carts went not beyond this point—those water-carts were a baptismal nuisance in Seaborough. The light was growing more sober, gas twinkled in dusky drawing-rooms, shrubs in the gardens became shadowy of colour, hotel halls were lighted up, the line of windows of the Athenæum were all a-gleam, and patrons hurried up the

steps. He had come to a region of well-paved streets, broad thoroughfares; the best shops, the square, the wide opening to the marine front. Right and left the fine houses of residents and visitors, two considerable hotels, boarding-houses, and those displaying the magic word "APARTMENTS" in the slips of garden. Before it all a well-kept walk of sea-sand and shell, turf with seats, shrubs and a few flower-beds; and upon this agreeable promenade, in the centre of which the town subscription band played, the company walked up and down, chattering one to another, quizzing style, and criticising appearance, or lounged on the seats, listening to the music and watching the stars peep forth above the sea.

As Mrs. Blake's dress swept the greensward, train some inches longer than anybody else's, with her little girl, Rose, as a foil, but more beautiful than all the promenade put together, every one looked over shoulder at the new comer, wondering what distinguished personage it could be; some few followed on trail, easy of accomplishing without offence, and Hannington's robe excited a just proportion of envy. The Visitor's List would be out on the morrow, and curiosity might be satisfied, unless, unfortunately, it was some grand duchess preserving strict *incognito*. Or it might even be one of royal lineage—it had been rumoured that the Prince of Wales would send his children to Seaborough for a quiet month. That lovely girl—they saw the features of the Queen in the little gold-encircled face. Perfectly aware of the commotion she was causing, having come on purpose, Mrs. Blake walked with imperial carriage, head erect, Seaborough at foot; why not? Joseph had money! Only the night before they had talked of retiring, and Mrs. Blake, poking a sharp nose out of the night-cap, mentioned cream-coloured ponies and bells without good-tempered Joseph kicking.

No one was more annoyed than Mrs. Major Howard, who by this distinguished advent was dethroned. For a long time the military lady had held sovereign sway at Seaborough. She did keep a pony-chaise and tiger, she had the real original court presence; and when a girl, she had received lessons in deportment. Papa was in a very good position, and Mamma

had angled for a knight at that time. The Major possessed a pretty house just off the Marine Parade. No one was quite certain about his income, or about the probability of the little bills being paid, but, as the Major referred everybody to the Duke of Cambridge, and as nobody in Seaborough quite knew how to approach that great person, the Major's dignity and social importance were taken for granted, and very great court was paid to them. Mrs. Howard considered herself a lady of the first water, and her head tossed at the Blake *entrée* with ominous significance, as much as to say, "Some tradesman's wife, I'll be bound!" Mrs. Major Howard did not believe so, the stranger was too *en règle* for that; but the words fitted. Major Howard walked beside his lady, composed and dignified, twirling a cane, as accustomed to give command, and as quite at ease in Court or Camp. Mrs. Howard's "Just look at the woman, Major," provoked no descent from that broad frontage and Cæsar-like mien; a twinkle of pleasantry across to his friend Sir Charles Neville, who walked by the side of the Major's lady, that was all. But Sir Charles, who admired Mrs. Howard with a naughty Dumas order of admiration, looked reproachful, and gave it as his firm opinion there was nothing in the woman, and whatever the folks were staring at he couldn't imagine; a verdict that raised the handsome young fop for the first time in the estimation of careful Mrs. Howard.

Quite removed from these, observant alike of the Major's party and of the fresh arrivals, was a lady of singular elegance, yet dressed with quiet good taste. She walked the lawn in company with her son, without attracting any particular measure of attention: there was that upon her face, however, the thoughtful would have gazed twice and thrice upon without understanding, so strange an expression it was at times. This was Mrs. Vincent, of whom more anon. She resided at The Cottage, Sleperton, near by the mysterious old Manor House, called by Walter Gordon's informant the Hall. Sleperton Manor, he rightly said, had a story of its own, a weird, ghastly sort of story; no ancient legend surrounded by an atmosphere of blue fire, but a chronicle of the day; and rumour said Mrs. Vincent was somehow mixed up with it.

Any way she alone had the run of the deserted place, excepting always the steward, Reuben Smith, of the Manor Farm, who kept the keys. These two, Mrs. Vincent and Reuben Smith, were the worst of friends. When, soon after the Lord of the Manor disappeared from among men—gone to foreign parts it was said—Reuben locked alike doors and gates, and evidently meant the place to keep so, he was one evening surprised to see their very quiet and lady-like neighbour emerge. An altercation ensued, which she closed abruptly by producing duplicate keys of the various entrances, and a Paris-dated letter from the owner, Lord Lindon, giving herself and son permission, whenever agreeable, to visit the Manor House, use the library, and any other of his possessions, at pleasure. This settled it, but at the same time shrouded it,—the mystery had thickened.

On this evening walk, amongst other of the company studied by that quiet observer, Mrs. Vincent, young Mr. Gordon came in for his share of contemplation and speculation. The pale, wasted, delicate face, with its outline of melancholy beauty, was yet so full of intelligence and refinement, it became the haunting memory of all others. He sat far beyond track of the fashionables, hidden by shrubs, apparently reading—a book was open, his face was down.

While the events narrated were passing at one part; nearer the band were assembled the people who belong to the order that go right up to the wall at the Academy—*butt* at the pictures as it were—and stare at conceptions four inches ahead on the magnifying principle. Similarly they must listen to the music, have one ear inside the trombone or none of it.

Here were Harry Abbott, and Harry Abbott's wife, and Harry Abbott's girl, as pleasant a group as you well might see. Harry was stout and rosy-faced, farmer-like, kindly, humoursome, hospitable; it was all in that florid, good-natured face; the shake of the hand was cordial, and conveyed a feeling of sincerity; the tone of the voice brimmed with laughter, honest, contented, and Saxon.

Harry Abbott's wife (she was always spoken of in that familiar fashion, never as Mrs. Harry Abbott) was a veritable fac-simile of Harry Abbott's self—homely, kind, frank, and

genuine. Their daughter had just left boarding-school, was a merry, boisterous, awkward lass, with sheep's eyes on Lorry Vincent, who was impervious as a prince.

And here was Dr. Hunter, the leading practitioner of Seaborough, who walked the turf now and then to see who was ailing; a tall, pale man given to poking one in the ribs and looking from habit at the lips, as though every tongue would hang forth at the mute interrogation. The Doctor had a grudge against Seaborough—it was over-healthy, people didn't ail as they ought, seeing they were born into this ailing world. Dr. Hunter was skilful, the sphere was a contracted one, the parish professional did the lower orders, and was immensely popular: still Dr. Hunter took all quietly, looked reproachfully at the robust, the well-shaped, the vigorous, and with equable assurance stood on his dignity. If people were vulgar and gross, and not sufficiently well-bred to wear delicately, they must be pitied, it was certain they could not be helped.

It is strange people never tire of walking up and down the spasmodic little reaches allotted them, never tire of the perpetual gossip about each other. The routine at this retired watering-place was similar to that of its rivals, except that, being of lesser degree, faces were known quicker and remarks the sooner exhausted; it became difficult indeed to discover or invent notelets of interest upon dress or appearance, and the only bones left for picking were the antecedents. Seaborough had picked at Mrs. Vincent until that charming lady was bare as a bleached skeleton, yet was Seaborough as mystified as at the beginning; it could not disentangle that past history, the pre-widowhood. Had anybody known the lamented Mr. Vincent? Not one of them! Elegant as were the appointments of The Cottage, had anybody ever seen a portrait at all to be construed into that of Lorry's papa? Nobody. The lady lent books sometimes, could recollection serve for a bold masculine hand, a bold masculine name? Only Lorry's school-boy hangers. Had a male umbrella been observed in the stand? No, only the slight-built protection from the sun, black and grey and steel and shot, which Mrs. Vincent called her sunshade. They were still busy at the bones—difficult to get at

as those in the show-caverns, but interspersed with occasional snatches at Mrs. Major Howard and others. Upon this evening, however, all Seaborough was to be paralysed; a stranger was seen walking with Mrs. Vincent, and the most remarkable-looking stranger ever seen within the municipal bounds, talking earnestly, as was evident; no mere acquaintance-gossip; and Seaborough kept an argus eye upon the stranger. He might be the Emperor of somewhere, or he might be the nobody who is always to hand, but he was not by any means a fascinating person outwardly, and Seaborough was excited; agitation that arrived at a climax when he was seen shaking hands with Sir Charles Neville, was heard introduced to Mrs. Major Howard and the Major, as—

"My friend, Mr. Noel Barnard!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TANGLED DIPLOMACY THICKENS.

Beresford Travers, Esq., and Mr. Herbert Garston.

An elderly handsome man, portly, with remarkably fine head, pleasant features, an open generous expression, white hair arranged with considerable care, through which he often passes a very white, somewhat large hand, whereon an enormous diamond set in slender gold seems to have an easy time of it. Attire faultless, so black as to dazzle; a white cravat, spotless wristbands, and black-studded front, over which luxuriantly descended the silver beard to the vest. This was the only living representative of the houses of Beresford and Travers, the first the most ancient of patrician families, the latter of more modern origin but of great wealth.

Hardly less prepossessing in appearance, but altogether cultivating a *négligé* style that was an agreeable blending of the artist-tourist and the gentleman-sportsman, Herbert Garston, friend and *protégé* of this gentleman of the old school, was a study upon which the eye might well delight to rest—frank and candid, and possessed of a rough-and-ready manly dignity that invited confidence and assured of honour.

These are talking upon important business at the moment we intrude, and exigencies of our story demand our listening for a time. Scene:—an old-fashioned drawing-room in the St. James's Street residence of Mr. Travers.

"But is your information reliable, my dear Garston?"

"Quite, sir! The man is a second Nero. I believe there is scarcely any length to which he would not go in furtherance

of his revenge, his malice, and his ambition. I have no moral doubt that, indirectly, he encompassed your son with difficulty, and brought about the sad catastrophe."

Mr. Travers passed his hand over the eyes that for an instant became clouded.

"I had no conception such a character existed outside a romance, or off the melodramatic stage!"

"Ah! he's not of that order! Why this fellow banks at the London and Westminster; and is equable as a General! I verily believe he looks upon the world as one vast strategy ground. He's so infernally like a Jack-in-the-box,—excuse warmth,—he seems starting up in all parts of the island at once, he quite undoes all preconceived and orthodox notions of the villain proper! I'm no sooner on his trail in one county than he appears in another with the rapidity of the Devil on two sticks; I shall soon begin to think he keeps a reserve of steam engines and packets!"

Mr. Travers smiled at the bluntness of his attached friend, whom he had known from boyhood, and ever the same faithful, impetuous, stubborn, hotheaded piece of honesty. Herbert Garston had sworn to unearth this fox, in the interests of his poor dead comrade in Art and Letters, upon whose honoured name a stigma rested; in the interests of his beloved benefactor, the patron and encourager of his every endeavour. *Not* in a dependent point of view; to set which delicate matter right once for all it may be disclosed that Herbert Garston was the only son of a wealthy widow.

"We never noticed anything particularly vicious about the man, a little sombre perhaps sometimes, and I think poor Lionel did once make the remark that occasionally, when reading with him, he wore a gloomy expression, such as he fancied Aram might have worn; apart from this he was always reserved, quiet, thoughtful, and gentlemanly."

"Yes, that is precisely his aggravating point; he has the manners of a Roman Emperor united to the business talent of a City merchant, the cleverness of a barrister, the subtle cunning of the worst old fox overrunning your estate. But I think I've got him—yes, I think I've got him."

Mr. Garston's hazel eyes twinkled and blinked with the gratification of a man who has something to communicate, he has been keeping in reserve. The big diamond flashed with sympathy, and Mr. Travers drew his chair closer, waiting without speaking and with eager, restless expression, as dreading something unpleasant. Mr. Travers objected to anything unpleasant upon principle; anything that disarranged the reposeful grace of his years and position.

"I have added one of Sir Kinnaird Dalton's men to my staff of auxiliaries."

"A good stroke that." Garston nodded complacently.

"I don't like the business, but it's no use employing clean tools for dirty work; if this man could be touched by the law we would let it take him off our hands, but he is so deucedly clever no law can touch him; prove him on the very square inches of a crime, he would prove himself to have been two hundred miles removed at the time, and that is a feat in tactics we can't get over."

"I trust poor Ella is placed above the effects of his machinations, and that she has well considered the proposals of my letter."

"To provide for her child—"

"Removed altogether from her care, and placed absolutely and entirely under my own; I would derive happiness from this proposition, of which its mother deprived me."

Very quiveringly the old gentleman thus alluded to the blow that had shattered the idealism of his home.

"You also make provision for—for Mrs. Travers. Am I correct, sir?"

"Quite, my dear boy. I have suggested,—only suggested, for she is delicately sensitive, poor thing!—that I should regard it quite in the light of a sacred duty, and not as placing her under any obligation; if she would allow me to supply her with two hundred pounds per annum, merely for immediate calls, of which there are so many in life."

"And you still keep to your determination not to see her!"

"Nothing can ever alter that!"

"It is the only thing I cannot reconcile with your nobility, your goodness. Forgive me!"

"Well as you know me, Herbert, you can have little sympathy with myself in that trouble; you cannot realize the whole experience. But this is not for discussion. I don't know how we wandered on the theme. You were speaking of—"

"Yet a word,—tell you why in an instant;—would you have the little girl at the Park?"

"No; I've arranged with the Percivals. You know them. Highly respectable and superior people; they rent my largest farm; have a son in town,—writes, I believe. Mrs. Percival will act like a mother with the little one, whom I shall see at intervals. Why did you ask?—No consequence, you know,—only thought you might have a motive."

"And so I have. Noel Barnard has been seen in the neighbourhood again."

The diamond flashed ominously. Mr. Travers arose, walked impatiently to the window, looked out on the dull street,—"More wet, I think!" and returned to the recesses of fragrant leather.

"I was going to say that was bad news; but I don't really know that it need trouble us in the least."

"I've got so in the habit of looking for mischief following any visit Mr. Barnard favours one with, that I look on trouble as a natural consequence."

"Did you intend to suggest at the outset that you had ascertained anything of his antecedents?"

"I did. He has been *married*. At that time he was in India—"

"India?"

"He seems to have been half over the globe. I find his trail in both hemispheres. And he had one child,—a girl,—although what became of her I have been unable to trace."

"Well, this is certainly fresh. I confess you have surprised me."

"Next time I call, I hope to have more to tell you. If my Piccadilly informant be faithful I ought to make progress."

Mr. Travers arose, as indicating the interview was at an end.

"You will lunch with me; carriage at three for the Row?"

"Thank you very much. I promised to be in Harley Street, to play companion to my mother, who is at present without that necessary adjunct to her household."

"Good! Never fail in attendance upon your mother; there can be no worthier. Please tender my best respects. Look in any evening agreeable for our quiet duel at chess. So glad yours is not a club taste, which wars with the domestic!"

After his young friend's departure (we call Mr. Garston young comparatively; in years he was about thirty,) the gentleman indulged a brief soliloquy:—

"The dear fellow is plunging heart and soul into this unthankful work. It was no ordinary friendship between the boys, and—and—although neither word nor hint ever warranted the assumption, I believe Herbert liked poor Ella, but for honour checked the sentiment. If so, this energetic quest may not be as disinterested as appears. Verily I may not flatter my foolish years by supposing a manly young fellow is going to dance on service for my advantage, with never thought of reward other than the friendship, nay love, of an old man who would have been proud of a son like this. Not to injure my lad by the thought; alas! He is removed now from any injury coldness can inflict."

And what a beautiful smile, paternal and benevolent, was upon the Squire's face as he saw a happy time ahead, when his fairy-like grandchild would flit through the fields and woods, bringing garlands to enwreath his horse's neck! Her feet should patter over the old polished boards where her mother's were wont to beat music, and all the associations of the elder Ella, that to this day were bleeding wounds, would be healed by this newer charm, that must combine the lovely graces of the two he had most loved, his son and ward; this, *this* should bring back smiles, and laughter, and sunshine, and glad music to the great drawing-rooms at Beresford Court; this should renew his interest in life, revive old love, replant sweet dreams

that blossomed once,—the purest, loveliest under Heaven. And he closed his eyes, and wove of shreds of memories, lingering charms of his boy and his girl, a creation small and delicately fair, with graces many as the fawn's, and a young heart full of love that must centre about himself. But he would be cautious, not see too much of her, not allow himself to become too fond of her; he had done so once, and had learnt the sharp lesson of idol-worship, and would never do so again—never again.

Later, in the Park, he met Mr. Noel Barnard superbly mounted. That personage raised his hat with the air of a prince, and his most fascinating smile. The old gentleman coldly acknowledged the salutation,—he had too fine breeding to ignore it altogether.

The Duke of Huntingtowers had his team in the Park that afternoon, and pulled up for a word with Mr. Beresford Travers; their estates in Hertfordshire joined, and both had property about St. Alban's. This had produced a neighbourliness.

"By-the-bye,"—after the greetings and usual three minutes' gossip,—"Cousin Dalton has bought that place of your poor son's in Devonshire. Was told of it but ten minutes ago."

Mr. Travers stooped, even to the girth, which he tested with his hand, and then raising his head, with quiet and pleasant but slightly flushed face, he remarked,—

"This is quick work, my lord; I was unaware of it."

"It's an awfully go-ahead age. Ta! ta! I've rather a bolter here."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LAST NIGHT IN THE OLD HOME.

In the twilight's soft and solemn hour, by the open window, looking upon the pleasure-wilderness of flowers and trees, and the far, rich tract, hill-girt, sea-bordered. Too soon the familiar landmarks were becoming shadowy and dim,—less colour, less form, with the tranquil outspreading of the mists, the silent march of the factions of the kingdom of gloom.

A star here and there, lights twinkling upon the hills, an after-glow upon the waves that dallied with the kiss until dead on the imperial bosom.

A cold wind astir, rattling dry twigs against the window pane, like invisible ones tapping for admission, and rustling of dry and withered leaves about the garden, bringing thoughts of that familiar hymn telling of decay.

The woman by the window shivered, chilled to the heart, tears coursing the pale cheeks, sobs shaking the slight form, moans broken upon the lips not long since wreathed about with smiles.

With arms clasped round her child, kneeling beside her trying to comfort; cold and as desolate.

Sad grey seemed tinting all the well-loved scene; they had never noticed it as on this evening. Sea, sky, earth, growing more dim and hueless every instant. They would have had that gold and roseate last a little longer,—with it departed the warmth of heart, the smile upon the face of their fair town.

They had no kind neighbourly one to breathe a word of

solace, people had long forgotten the existence of such very unfortunate folks, and she had no reward whereby to retain the sympathy of professional comforters; therefore had she been alone in her grief, forsaken in her trouble, utterly deserted.

Stay! That child! Words,—frail, winged things, ineloquent,—cannot tell the comfort of her child. That small presence, so wonderfully made, slight and slender, of small account by laws that govern physics, yet had helped to fill the aching void of that dreaded loss, the hardest trouble a sensitive gentlewoman can ever know,—the loss of home. She had been hugging this to her heart and soul, and thinking she could bear it so this were left; and now the ordeal was approaching, and stern necessity, unsatisfied, claimed the darling also.

It was a blank, horrible alternative. She had besieged Heaven for strength to do the thing required of her, to put her sweet one far from her, and struggle and fight alone,—nor man, nor woman, nor child, to help on by the tenderness of company.

How beautiful was every object upon which the eye rested! But twelve years' endearing association, yet her very life seemed linked to these treasures the stately lady-mother of her husband had held as dear,—and all to pass to the unfeeling hand of the stranger, who would alter and destroy until the place that knew her would know her no more. For, romantic ideas of working, working, working, until Lionel's name and fame were cleared; of purchasing again his cherished home; of passing here the remainder of her days; these Utopian dreams had flitted, but iron sense had brought iconoclasm to mind, and she experienced the hard truth that the sacred precincts, profaned by the stranger, were never the same again.

She reasoned with herself, poor little soul, and calculated in this manner; supposing she obtained a situation, and put by the two hundred pounds mentioned in her death-warrant,—for so it seemed to her,—still it would take years to pay off her poor husband's bills, (set down within some hundred thousand pounds,) let alone repurchase of the home.

And if she refused to give up her child, she would be poorer than the vagrants, more ill-fated than the houseless; and mother and child worn and worse for suffering and denials. They had been accustomed to every luxury under the sun, (he was no niggard, dead Lionel,) and they could not take to dry, hard fare upon the instant; the course of deprivation had so weakened and subdued, even suffering lost half the sting of its poison-fang, so benumbed were the faculties by natural pain. To see the child grow weaker day by day would be maddening; would be criminal, with such an offer open, as had been submitted by the friend and guardian for whom she experienced the same reverent gratitude and love as had animated her heart when first living under his care. The love that guardian had no longer concealed after the blow had fallen,—but which punctilious and too nice a sense of honour had constrained him to disguise so long,—had been as great surprise to her as Lionel; neither had suspected it, or perhaps their reverent affection would have made them root out that which would then have seemed a guilty, selfish passion.

Despite her sorrows she was passing fair, and these two seemed sisters rather than mother and daughter. As for the child,—an apple-blossom, a bouquet of snow-flakes, spray of the sea,—to what not that is exquisite shall she be likened?

The deep auburn of the mother's luxuriant hair, unconfined, strayed lovingly with the clear gold of the child's, lustrous, even by that light.

The fields and orchards, gardens and groves, sent forth the fragrance of night, sweeter than it had ever seemed, more odorous than perfumes by dim altars in Eastern churches.

It was a weirdly sweet time: sad, bitter, filled with dead pain, the gloaming stealing something every minute; yet even as it faded, the Evening star, growing brighter, fascinated like the jewel-eye of the fable.

Terraces, statues, fountains, paled and grew grey, then draped with shadow, until they seemed all hung about with mourning. And surely some one was hanging those trees with a pall—and it was not so long since mother and child

had swung laughingly there to music—and rose-showers thrown by a man's strong hand.

That chain of mournful memories, regrets, laments, dread recollections, would obtrude and overrun even her later griefs. And the clasp of the little, warm hand, the hasty, anguished glimpses of those eyes where tears were bravely checked, the voice that was strung to tune comfort, but seeming to falter with pain; it was the lone, waste, unutterably tried hour, the agony of a double parting; and words cannot describe the horror of the desolation in view.

"Mamma dear, do not tremble so; let me close the window. Why, you are still crying! Pray do not cry, all will come right. See there's the star of Hope, we shall yet be happy, we shall be *together;* and God will watch over us. I don't mind anything while I have you, Mamma! Let me kiss the tears away! Nay, I will sit upon your knee, and nestle my head here as I used; why not, dear mother? If we are poor we but cling the closer, it will bring us nearer, this ugly poverty you dread so! Oh! don't do that, so many who are poor are loving, they've nothing else to live for. Smile on me, mother dear, it is so long since a smile was like light on your beautiful face! I don't care a bit, if you will only try to stop crying; you are sobbing *so* dreadfully. See, I draw your lips down to mine, and will keep them here until you leave off crying. Why, we're through the worst, and I—little I—saw them take my doll's house and the pretty dressed things, and my puzzles and books, all, that you and Papa gave to me, and I never shed a tear! The man with the big, dirty hands said he had a lass they'd do for, and I have had many a pleasant time with them, and wouldn't be so selfish as to say him nay, poor man! And our gilt and white chairs, why, Mamma, we never used to sit in them. The piano I couldn't bear to play, and your Berlin and Silk work isn't half so nice and useful as good strong calico. If our beds are gone, we shall find some one who will lend us another, and now you know, dear, we shall always sleep together: if the bed's hard, the more healthy; poor Papa often said so. And don't you remember when at the University he always slept on the mattress in preference? It will be

a new life to us, but I shall like it; I always did wish for a gipsy life, didn't I, dear? A little cart and a cottage, some chickens and a shaggy dog, plenty of blackberries, and no fear of spoiling one's frock! Cheer up, Mamma; I for one am longing for the morning!"

A mere child! The talk is not to be weighed and criticised; it was said to comfort. That nursling had turned stronger of the two; bird-like sweetheart of the dead, could the man's fond ears have heard!

Suddenly, quiveringly alert, the mother raised ears, listened, strained eyes; all the garden swart and dusk, dark shadows on places where they had walked their last. Her nervously susceptible hearing had detected a footstep, upon gravel, upon dry grass, upon leaves; soft, stealthy, receding from the bower of Virginia creeper near their window.

She closed this, pressed the child frantically to her heart, the drawing-room was unutterably desolate now, with cruel shadows lurking, and flitting of spectral things that trooped forth to mock and gibe at the friendless.

"Thanks, pretty; it is good of you to try and comfort poor Mamma; oh, my darling, I am so wretched, so very wretched!"

It was a wail wrung from the bleeding heart, an awful moan of despair at its utmost extremity.

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERIOUS GIFT.

They were both timorous now that night had set in; alone in the desecrated house, far removed from any other habitation.

"Come, dear, we will not stay here; let us bolt the door and go upstairs!"

Little Ella was naturally as nervous as a mouse, but she plucked her courage by the ears and made it lead; she even essayed a skip, but that broke short, it made such an unearthly sound on the floor of the empty room.

A gust of cold, dusty wind shot in at the door as she opened it, and went scouring round the place like the manes of an old charwoman.

The great hall with its two pillars looked sepulchral and ghostly, and the patter of their feet upon the stone echoed away with quavering monotone, like footfalls in the ghoul-haunted temples of India.

There was not even a rug to break the shivering glide over the white vastness that chilled as a Polar plain.

The dull thud of the bolt, and gibbet rattle of the chain, filled the space with a thunderous din that caused them to leap with terror; it died away in time, crept out by the rear offices, muttering and grumbling.

Four large doors—a fleck of light from over the entrance shimmering on their knobs and polished panels.

Hand in hand—neither telling the other how tremulously—they crossed to the foot of the great stairs. Half way

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up, a window of violet and green, yellow and blue, disposed an uncertain ghastliness, and turned their wan faces yet more livid and deathly.

She could recall times when these stairs were the ascent of a pageant of colour, when her guests had trailed their sumptuous robing and taken lustre from the glass by gleaming of gems. Courtly men, stately dames, they had entertained in princely fashion, not one of whom would now pass her in a street while another thoroughfare was open. Society!

Above this a corridor, a line of guest-chambers, their own private apartments, and the tiny, nest-like boudoir apportioned to her daughter's use.

Here she would pass the still hours of that painful vigil, longing for the dawn. She could not sleep, she knew well; but, if possible, the child should do so while she watched protectingly.

It was only a mattress from a servants' room which the brutal mercy of the broker had spared for their comfort, upon hearing they would remain over the night.

Stripped boards, bared walls, shreds and chips of lost treasures that had made the chamber beautiful. Damp air was floating in at the lattice sorrow had caused to be neglected for the first time. Hideous hoof-prints where the vulgar had trodden, grimy and reeking of stables. Shivered glass of the birdcage where the wretches had tossed her pet to its freedom: when a thin ridge of blood rose to the child's lips, but no moan or movement, other than warmer pressure of the hand she had held to her strong, brave heart. The mother shuddered upon returning to the scene of that horrible trial.

"Let me sit up with you, Mamma dear; I'm not in the least sleepy to-night!"

"No, my darling, do you get your rest! First let me hear your prayers!"—said with choking, for it would be the last time. She closed the door, the keys had been removed; her tottering limbs scarcely supported their burden.

"Now, darling!" The child fell at those knees where she had knelt so often, although there had been nights—grand party nights, when this lady could not spare the time—

(she recalled each one thus given to her heartless visitors when her child and her God had been set aside, failing convenience,—as if Society would make allowance for a young Church of England mother's feelings and obligations), when the little one had been reduced to the fidgety nursemaid alternative, with hasty interruption midway of the sweet prayer: "Come, Miss Ella, make haste!" or, a plucking at the nightdress, and—"Don't be all night, if you please, miss!" Grooms were waiting in the kitchen, and High Life below stairs could scarcely expect my lady's maid to dilly-dally about while my lady's child said her prayers. Society hasn't come to that either!

She said all the little prayer, and "God bless dear Mamma and Papa," in her sad thoughtfulness forgetting, "and make me a good girl," then the simple hymn, said since she had stood no higher than the lilies by the garden gate.

Then without a word, rising from her knees she kissed her mother, put off her frock, and crept upon the uninviting couch stretched on the floor.

Graceful as some reclining figure in Athenian studio, the lady leaned back upon her elbow, took the small hand, bent over it, and for many minutes thus remained with lips sealing the wondrous love.

There was but little light, sufficient, however, to disclose the mournful grace of that pathetic picture, had any one been there to see.

All upon the impulse, unable to control herself any longer, the lady raised her head, looked little one in the eyes,—swift, it was heart-lightning,—and in a breath, a gasp, questioned her almost hoarsely:—

"Could my Ella bear her Mamma to leave her?—Would you like to visit some one who would be very kind, where you would have dresses and presents good as those you have lost, and a beautiful garden to play in?—A beautiful garden," added the ward of those happy days, recalling its devious, pleasant paths.

"I would not like to go anywhere without you, Mamma, and what's more, *I won't!*"

The bare supposition was an outrage, and Ella resented it

accordingly, and with more emphasis than it was her custom to display.

A smile, the first that day, broke upon the lady's features, yet an embarrassed, hesitating smile; how was this to be answered?

"But if I wished it, Ella?"

"If you were placed the same, or so that I could not help you, and should not be of use any longer, I would *try* to obey your wishes; it was Papa's last word to me—'Always do as Mamma wishes you, my dear little girl!'"

Tears were by this time filling the child's eyes; she kept them well from discovery by turning upon her side, as though tired. She was concocting an innocent scheme to assume sleep, thinking her mother might then snatch a little rest.

"And you would not forget your prayers each night, or to pray for dear Mamma; you would not forget me, Ella?" she asked breathlessly.

"Forget you?" murmured the child reproachfully.

"Not think so much of kind, fresh faces, that mine would grow less remembered?"

"No! Not if I did not see you until I was grown up, and came to live with you again for ever! I am going to sleep now, Ma dear; kiss me!"

She swooped like a leopardess, holding her whelp in peril, swoops upon her crouching young; she clung to her fiercely, and spent the fury of her love upon that long embrace.

"Good night!" And she repeated while the child settled down to her pretended slumber, "Good night! And dream of guardian angels, darling!"

After that the room was strangely hushed, and the creakings of boards, and attendant night-sounds, echoed the hollowness rampant everywhere. A lonely, unaccompanied night in a large, unfurnished house, isolated of site, encircled by grim firs, none living knowing of one's presence there, must be one of the most dispiriting watches man or woman can pass.

It was not without its terrifying influences upon this deli-

cate lady, who had always been used to plenty of light and brilliance, warmth, and companionship.

She started at the gentle course of mice within the wainscot; and the flapping of bats' wings against the window-pane affrighted the gaze bent on the star of hope.

The hour must be getting late. She had neither watch nor clock left whereby to tell, but she guessed by the circled hills where lights had all disappeared, and only that cold and stately star was left to bear her company. And the bats kept coming in the way of that.

Breathing of the child was heavier. The worn-out cherub faint with hunger, wearied beyond measure, must have passed to sleep, to her pure dreaming of the angels.

Again, for the second time, the woman fancied she detected the sound of a footstep, and this seemed outside the door, pausing in the corridor at that spot. In mortal fear she recoiled as her glance *would* wander in that direction, and she tried to reason herself out of such fancies, and moved gently from the bed, that she might set these fears at rest. She quickly advanced to the door, with some trepidation opened it, and stood out upon the landing. Nothing was to be seen, and she was about returning to the room, when she remembered that, upon closing the window at which they had been sitting, she had failed to clasp the latch. She would hurriedly descend to make all quite safe, and she softly closed the door, and as softly ran down stairs.

Now thoughtful Miss Ella, who had been doing a cat-sleep, was quite unprepared for this, and lay there panting in a pretty fear. To be all alone upstairs in existing circumstances was a fate she had never contemplated, in her worst dread and most fearful expectancies. It was so dark, she scarcely dared open her eyes. So still, she scarcely dared breathe. She was at the very height of her feverish terror, the hot, suffocating minutes seemed hours, and the horror sat heavy as a nightmare; when, suddenly, her door reopened, a muffled, shadowy something entered, groped for her bed, knelt, stooped its head, panting, with short breath and burning lips, and alighted with a swift, soft, maddening kiss upon the bud-like mouth it

seemed as though it would consume: the child all the time still as though sleeping, but really benumbed by fear; not supernatural fear, but that which dreads the unknown danger coming with robbers and other midnight visitors, stock threats of stupid maids. Scarcely an instant did it stay, but leaving an envelope beside the child, departed; and she was wonderingly wide awake, staring at the door.

While this proceeded above, that which befell Mrs. Travers remains to be related. It was more of a task than she had anticipated; or rather she had given it such bare thought; but at the foot of the stairs her courage sank; she looked for her star, violet or green, yellow or blue, what matter so it be there: it was clouded. The darkness was more dense; no light now from above the door; each chamber black as the entrance to a tomb; and the wind howling without, rattling within, until the place seemed overrun by skeleton feet.

Guitar and harp had quivered in these rooms where the wolfish blasts were now on chase.

She hurried past, gained the drawing-room; the window was open; a man was stepping from the casement to the bed of flowers below.

Shrinking back she caught sight of the dread face while he turned to close the window.

It was the face of her foe—Noel Barnard.

He had not seen her; he hastened with long strides across the garden, out by a little gate giving egress to a quiet Devon lane, and appeared as though looking for some one who might be concealed within the grounds. She noted the action as singular; what could induce him to take that unfrequented way, a way that conducted to the shore?

She quickly latched the window, and almost flew upstairs to her child, so alarmed was she at the presence of that man.

The child uttered a cry of delight, and when her mother had closed the door and drawn up their poor bed against it, the only barricade, she told the strange incident which had occurred during her absence.

Mrs. Travers was aghast. Half afraid she took the contents of the envelope to the window, and read even by that light

the word 'FIFTY' very large upon two crisp notes, Bank of England.

She could not speak, but staggered to the bed, and now her strength gave way, she fell thereon, and still without one word.

Had she fainted, or what was this? With a cry of terror the child, clinging and embracing, implored for but one word, but one! And all was still, save for the dirge-like, strangled echo of her appeal. Still, deadly still; and only that little girl! Alone, with this new and surpassing misery, and all the host of fears, and all the weight of her own and this other's sorrow, and the faint, deadly weariness and sickness of her own heart.

Beat against the panes, ye bats; coil, obscene shades, within the corners; shriek, ravenous winds, in the outer courts; gleam on her lovely head, coward lightning of the summer-night; hoot, owls, on the funereal pines; fall, rain-drops, like taps upon coffin-lids; peal above her, thunders of darkness; stretch forth lank talons, spectres and goblins; dart grisly fangs, glide on her, phantoms! Hound forth ye all, for 'tis a delicate girl-child whose mother lieth low, and there is none of human kind to help!

Ella was conscious of it all; kneeling by the outstretched form beloved so utterly, she engaged in wonderful child prayer; then by degrees the uplifted hands drooped, the head bowed, and like a flower borne over by its weight, the little form fell upon her mother's breast.

And Eagle Hall was silent as a mansion of the dead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE KNIGHT OF THE ÆGEAN.

Ashton St. Aubyn, smoking a hookah, reclining upon a pile of skins; around him new books from India, latest publications of the Presidencies: tropical flowers, and broad-leaved plants, and clouds of gauze and lace shading the low, carven chamber, fragrant of woods as a spice *châlet* of the Southern Islands.

Lena at his feet, upon a cushion of Damascus, quaintly attired,—as became their seclusion and his poetical taste, in style that was a blending of Moore, Byron, and Chateaubriand,—in white cashmere and gold. And vastly pretty did Princess look, as upon one hand a bird of gorgeous plumage waited to be soothed with *bonbons* from the other.

Mr. St. Aubyn had been disturbed that morning, and was trying to smoke it off. He could not read,—a parcel of magnificent drawings, recently received from Paris, remained unopened,—the hound stole up and laid its cold nose upon his hand without caress.

Lena threw the choicest of the *bonbons* at Papa, tossed off her bird, and curled herself indolently beside him on the tawny leopards, pulling at the tassel of his cap,—at a dark chestnut curl astray below,—at his olive velvet smoking-gown, trying to scatter his preoccupation.

"Don't let it trouble you, sweet! The man is not likely to return after such a message."

Lena had been sitting, as usual, at her silken embroidery in a *bosquet* of the garden, sometimes looking out to sea, thinking of all sorts of things blended of butterflies and sun-beams,—

when she became aware of the bobbing up of a head above the fence,—a head unpleasant to look upon as Cruikshank's Jack Sheppard; and the thing was such a wonder, she had still looked, and finally burst out laughing at it, and then tripped into the house, to tell grave Papa over his books and papers.

All her life she had looked upon only his kingly beauty, and the white-haired clergyman of the benignant face, who sometimes called to see St. Aubyn, and she had no idea any thing as ugly existed in the world; as it certainly did not in her world of beauty and light. Therefore Princess made much of this, as children make of Punchinello.

Not so St. Aubyn. To his girl's surprise he put her hastily from him, and bade her never sit within that part again, or within view of the fence anywhere; then melted to sudden tenderness and kissed her, drawing the sunny head to his heart; but she felt that flutter like a bird ruffled at presence of the hawk.

Then he had strode with jerking pace, thoughtful, as of a general overtaken in his tactics, clutching at his gown, convulsively, looping the cord, and muttering, "After all my pains, after all these years!" up to a small, round spy-place,—a side window set between the gables, whereby to reconnoitre the tangle-way of the approach,—and he saw the man astride the wall.

He had seen him before, long back in the years when this hermit was a beau in society, and the world was a court for the play of his imperial breeding; and the man was unaltered other than to become more villainous in appearance. The sight chilled him, and St. Aubyn turned passionately, to find the black-and-white face at his shoulder, composed, glacial, lady-like.

"A trespasser, I think!" said as quietly, as though "Another peach upon the southern wall."

The Master was taken unawares.

"My dear Mrs. Brandon," seizing her arm, "oblige me by sending Williams to acquaint the man these grounds are strictly private,—the owner permits no intrusion. He—he can speak civilly, you know; we live so isolated, this person, of course, is unaware."

The lady bowed and glided to oblige. He had not once fumbled so, and could not for the instant encounter those twin spears, her eyes. The black alpaca and snowy cuffs, and the marble face with its raven bands, disappeared among the stands of orange and citron, and the Master waited while Williams went forth to parley.

And this was the interpretation of the civility; the servant from accident or design taking a fowling-piece in his hand,—

"You'll please to drop off that fence, young man. My master didn't put that up for such as you to ride on."

Still the man had not moved,—Williams trifling ominously with the gun. This antagonism might have been one of the lady's deep contrivings; St. Aubyn hung upon the issue of this impolitic course.

"Just tell your master, Mr. John Beech will do hisself the pleasure of calling this hevening!"

And the shock head bobbed, his ungainly form tumbled over, and the jagged line of boarding, with the level piles and joists, was clear of its unwelcome visitor.

This it was that had disturbed St. Aubyn more than he had been disturbed for nine long years. All day the hacienda was watched,—at evening the great outer gate was doubly locked.

Lena's blandishments had failed to woo the student from his gloom. She had known him always reflective, sometimes taciturn; but never gloomy and melancholy, as he had been this long, disagreeable day.

She resented it finely. She had whispered to Mrs. Brandon, "Papa is so grumpy!" and then had run away to her favourite nook, a cavity at the very edge of the cliff; here she had seated herself on the grass with a book, which she could dangle over the brink and read in mid-air, if she pleased; had trailed a slender white hand bird's-nesting, and caught up corners of the sandstone and wild garlands of pink and blue-eyed blossom; had watched the glory of the sun-set through a succession of majestic stages; and had made a discovery that set her thinking of other things than butterflies and sunbeams,—so eventful a day was this to our Princess St. Aubyn.

She had discovered a vessel, of shape different to any she had ever seen; it was floating past, swan-like, white, with outspread wings curved beautifully, and a grace that thrilled.

Lena closed her book, dropped her flowers, let her hair fall, unthinkingly, all about her glowing cheeks, down to the flower-strewn pinnacle; and she watched at her ease, delighted, lazily, —quaffing the nectar of that vast green garden of sea.

It was a yacht. Sunset on sails, on deck, on the young man lolling by the helm, on the telescope carried by the old skipper in attendance,—it seemed a beautiful, unreal sort of picture, half belonging to the serried ranks of that golden pageant of cloud.

While the girl was taking this stolen view, she was not, as she imagined, unseen by this Knight of the Ægean, who had been long regarding the picturesque section of the coast.

Viewed from the water, the romantic cliff, towering above its fellows, clothed with verdure, tinted all down its rugged side by hand more cunning than a painter's, with the wide facade of that mansion upon its summit, crowning the whole,—was sufficient to warrant the keenness of his interest. Taking the glass, he examined the scene with more attentive scrutiny. To the fore, cresting the border-line, he detected a little face, like fallen fruit upon the grass, and the sway and scatter of hair, to which the ruby glow in the sky lent a wonderful radiance. Over this, many flowers and trees; behind the mansion, walls rose, windows all a-gleam with crimson light—save one, where the ruby glare framed in a face and a figure, that was black and was white, where the quiet woman watched and waited.

"Wonder who the old party is, up at the window?" he said, laying down the glass and pacing the deck; and "I wonder what the little face upon the grass is like, come to be close to it! By Jove! An adventure after this monotonous cruise would be refreshing; this calmness of wind and smoothness of water bores one awfully. One might as well be back in the L. R. C."

"Brown" (to skipper), "whose place is that?"

"That, Mr. Arden? Why it's your father's friend lives there, bless him! You've heerd talk of Mr. St. Aubyn, who's so good to the poor?"

"I know; he gives my father a sum of money every year to distribute. Rather a curious man, I believe. So, that's his place, is it? What on earth led him to eyry like the eagles?"

"Well, that's no business of our'n, sure, sir. He's not in the way, and the wall was blank enough afore, as I can remember, hav'n' done the waters sin' a lad."

"Married, eh?"

"'Gad no, Mr. William, he's too wropt up in his darter, and like a speret she is, and seldom seen. He never lets her out o' sight for long, I reckon."

"Strange I've not heard my father speak of these people; but then I've not been home long enough to hear all the gossip!"

"Your father's a proper sort of a gentleman, Mr. William, and considering he's the only one as visits Mr. St. Aubyn, it isn't at all likely he'd chatter, if you was at home a sight of a time!" And honest old Brown, the Yorkshire fisherman, quite unconscious of having said aught imperfect in the direction of either grammar or civility, went at the waves as though mowing down ridges of grass with a brawny arm. William Arden, the pet of his college, gnawed viciously at the end of a cigar; he was unaccustomed to reproof, least of all when at home with the kind old pastor of the village church.

"Brown," he said slowly, "you're a bear!"

Then he lounged on the tarpaulin, leisurely took a note-book and wrote, repeating to himself, and looking up now and then at the cliff:—"Misanthropic recluse—inaccessible hiding-place, built on steep rock, wall surrounding, high as house—fearful abyss—haunted cavern at foot—smugglers, lovely damsel incarcerated—recluse eaten of jealousy,—spite of precautions, some fellow falls in love with Heloise,—blue fire—*dénouement*;—think that'll come in very well:—Now, Brown, for dinner!"

And while his factotum was busied at the larder, this young

scare-brain improved the shining hour by taking another glimpse of Hesperides.

The young lady was standing at about the same spot; by her side was a tall, dark, extremely handsome man; even that distance revealed the remarkable cast of features; and the girl seemed protesting, pointing downwards, shaking her head, and finally clinging about his neck with kisses.

"Disgraceful!" cried Mr. Arden, "and before the fishes!"

The gentleman had now caught sight of him, and dragged off the fair vision beyond power of his glass to follow.

"Brute!" quoth Ulysses irreverently, and there being nothing else left, directed the lens towards the singular face at the window.

"Tragedy-queen in repose!" he murmured, "or dragon of the enchantment;" then loudly, "Ready with the fowl, Brown?"

The old man answered the shout by one as lusty, and the owner of the yacht was in his tasteful little cabin at a stride. The dazzling roadway of surge and surf sent shafts to the silver cups and flagons; the wide western span of crimson and orange and opal was ploughed to a trail of gems; piles of luscious fruit tumbled the length of the snowy board; sherry-cups flashed from their facets, lips, and slender, curved lines; bunches of ferns, feathery and fragile, bowed to each other in rhythm; and looking around, Mr. Arden confessed nothing but the fair girl was wanting, to complete the picture.

The splash of the water, his dining music; blown sea-bloom the perfume upon his table; yet he still thought a little voice would better it; and Somebody's voice of the cliff it should be.

"Bring up the bottled beer, Brown; you'll take a glass yourself, man?"

Then as a curious sort of change, while Brown was busy at the lead and ice, he chanted one of the dirges to the sunset; a low, melodious tone in unison with the accompaniment:—

"Can it be the sun descending
O'er the level plain of water?
Or the Red Swan floating, flying,

Wounded by the magic arrow,
Staining all the waves with crimson,
With the crimson of its life-blood;
Filling all the air with splendour,
With the splendour of its plumage?
Yes; it is the sun descending,
Sinking down into the water;
All the sky is stain'd with purple,
All the water flush'd with crimson!
No; it is the Red Swan floating,
Diving down beneath the water;
To the sky its wings are lifted,
With its blood the waves are redden'd!
Over it the Star of Evening
Melts and trembles, through the purple
Hangs suspended in the twilight."

They had steered beyond sight of the house; only the cliff loomed grey of outline, sharp and hard, dead of its glow, colourless.

Faint far-off sound of a bell was heard ringing across the water.

William Arden walked to where the skipper was hoisting a sail,—

"Mermaidens, admiral?"

The old man placed a horny hand to his ear and listened,—

"The dinner-bell at the big house on the cliff, Mr. William!"

"Bless my soul! I'm very pleased, we'll dine together! By-the-bye, how's the wind?"

"Blows fresh—fresher nor all day! Keep outards, sir?"

"No, on the board; I will see that place by moonlight! Have some tobacco?"

"Young Master's taking a interest," muttered the seaman, plugging a pipe for himself; "I must furl wrong, for sink me if it's ship-shape pirating afore *his* house!" So dogged and devoted was the regard of the Yorkshire fishermen for the patron by whom they steered, by whom they swore.

CHAPTER XII.

AN UNPLEASANT VISIT.

Mrs. Brandon sat sewing in one of the apartments called the evening drawing-room, it being the custom to pass the time there after dinner. A large dusk room, all massive graining and gold, dark-coloured woods, panelled from the polished floor to the glistening brown rafters, lying back on the ceiling studded with golden stars upon a background of cerulean hue. An Indian carpet of grotesque design, and fierce, hot colours, covered a portion of the floor, and seemed an island of magic charms; at another part, a line of lion skins, the heads magnificently dressed for cushions, gave a tawny, un-English look to the singular interior. Two columns—solid trunks of Swiss mountain wood, arose at one end, where carved plantain leaves curled, affording rest for the waxen lights, a galaxy of which illuminated the rich colouring of this chamber. Between the plantains looped by thick cords of twisted silk, were blue rep curtains heavily braided and embroidered with gold. St. Aubyn, although he had acquired Eastern and Continental tastes, was not of sensuous likings. He might have crowded this chamber with luxurious couches and ottomans, and all the indolent comfort of Persia and Turkey, but he rather cultivated the stern ease of Arabian simplicity,—tanned skins, purple pillows of odorous herbs, burnished shields in lieu of mirrors, roughly-moulded vessels of red ware, with iced and fragrant waters; uncouth jars formed of twined dragons, gold upon orange clay, wherein the cactus flowered brilliantly; tables of intricate woodwork, more suited to the

summer-house, whereon volumes richly bound, a perfume in themselves, glowing with crimson, and yellow, and gold. The bronze mantel was loaded with curious glittering rock brought from stalagmitic chambers beyond two oceans, and with plumage of African birds, one wing of which was a picture.

Lena was lying upon one of the skins, inducing a kitten to leap from one to another in pursuit of a ball of silk.

Mrs. Brandon looked up from her needlework.

"Had you not better get up, Miss Lena? I am afraid you will spoil your frock, new not a week ago." It was of rich black velvet, with costly black lace falling from the snowy shoulders.

"Mrs. Brandon, I will *not* be dictated to in that way; if I care to roll about after pussy, I'll do so! Come here, tit, tit, tit!" And the refractory young lady laid herself out the length of a lion defiantly, knotting its mane, fixing her chin firmly upon its head, and looking up over its great eyes, impudently as you please, yet all dimples and smiles.

Mrs. Brandon continued her sewing, not a muscle disturbed; her cotton broke, she repaired the line quietly, even sweetly.

"I'm glad I am not your Mamma, my dear!"

"Now I'll just tell Papa that!"

The lady started from her seat, dropping the work.—

"Nay, my dear, I did but joke, pray do not worry your Papa about anything so trifling!"

"I can't make Papa out to-day at all, he seems upside down!"

"I think he would say the same of his daughter, could he see her now."

"Really, Mrs. Brandon, you *are* rude! (going a pilgrimage upon knees after the kitten's tail.) But that man this morning! And then being cross because I was watching that old boat—"

"Boat, my dear?"

"Well, little ship I might call it. It passed below near to the shore; nobody on board but a young gentleman and his man, they seemed to be enjoying themselves. I wished myself one

of the party; how nice it must be! I feel so dull sometimes, Mrs. Brandon!" sitting up now, thoroughly in earnest.

The lady looked at her with the expressive eyes where sympathy, commiseration, and aroused interest were made to play upon the girl's heart with subtle effect.

"Poor child! I daresay. The most favoured bird wearies of its cage sometimes."

Little in the words, and very gently said; but they sank deep.

"What a long time Papa is smoking after dinner to-day! I'll go and see after him."

And half petulantly the little girl ran from the room.

Taking advantage of her absence, Mrs. Brandon removed a letter from her bosom. It had been received that morning; it bore the London post-mark, and it was signed

Noel Barnard.

The contents ran,—

Hortense,

The man Beech has turned traitor. He may visit yours. Prevent interview with either. His object will be extortion. I give you carte-blanche to a Thousand. An exposure may ruin the girl's best chance. She must inherit all or none.

"Not while I can prevent it, Mr. Noel Barnard! With all your cleverness, you may be circumvented yet. You don't know Hortense Brandon altogether, shrewd as you are! So you've thought these dull, patient years of waiting have been for you? Well, work on, until all your plans turn out addled and impotent."

A sound, without, of footsteps being toilingly dragged in the direction of the drawing-room, and the girl's laughing voice, "Nay, but you shall, Papa; you are my prisoner, and shall come to judgment."

The door is dashed open, and St. Aubyn dragged in by the arm.

"Found him, all alone, smoking that nasty pipe, and looking so blue through the smoke, I hardly knew him! There, sir!"

In a breath, gathering all her strength for one vigorous push, she sent him back on a sofa of crimson cloth, spread with a magnificent array of tiger-stripes.

Mrs. Brandon, quite gently, and as a matter of course, laid down the work, walked to the remote extremity of the polished boards without so much as a footfall being heard, brought back the latest received *Calcutta Quarterly,* placed it upon the sofa beside him, unloosed a calabash containing juice of limes and iced water, always hanging within reach of his favourite couch; placed a glittering Algerian tray and coffee-service upon one of the small tables, and a fine cambric handkerchief, which she dipped in attar, beside the journal.

"Thanks! Mrs. Brandon; many thanks!"

Their eyes met, and this time she lowered hers, coy and timid, yet with appearance of thus veiling infinite devotedness.

"Oh, Mrs. Brandon does so much for you, Papa; and I do nothing,—except pull your beautiful curls."

Sitting on edge of the sofa half crying, Lena looked so prettily disconcerted, St. Aubyn said,—

"Mrs. Brandon is naturally thoughtful, my love."

"Well, and Mrs. Brandon's paid to think; and thinks to be paid!"

And jumping upon his knee, the speaker sat enthroned, and stared the ghastly face of her rival completely out of countenance. Mrs. Brandon might or might not have been displeased; nothing was seen of it but a trifle more paleness.

"Lena dear, I will not have you rude!"

"Oh, of course, Papa, take Mrs. Brandon's part."

A hammering at the great outer gate stopped further parley, and caused the inmates of the drawing-room to look at one another.

Presently came Williams with a half-scared face, saying,—

"The Man, sir!"

Mr. St. Aubyn arose with dignity.

"Inform this person that no strangers are admitted to my house at this, or any other, hour."

And he sat down with assumed calmness he was far from

feeling, an agitated, restless movement of the hand, the fingers contracting with a nervous grip, the teeth meeting with firm resistance.

Mrs. Brandon walked to the mantelpiece, with the subdued mien one wears when something unpleasant is upon the *tapis*. She leaned a hand upon the marble, and clinked quartz against mica, and feldspar with gneiss, and seemed as unconcerned as anybody between there and Scarborough.

Williams returned, this time looking troubled.

"What now?" asked St. Aubyn impatiently.

"When I'd got back, sir, I found him this side the gate. I said, 'You ain't bin long doing that little job, young man!' He said, 'I'm used to this work, I am.' So, what *you* think, Mr. St. Aubyn, I don't know; but what I thinks is this,—that he's come a-robbin', and I'm for locking him in somewhere till we can cart him over to York."

Further suggestion was delayed by a snap, of the bull-dog species, at the speaker's ear, which swung him completely round and into the hall, while the subject of his blunt advice marched his hob-nails over the polish. Williams was upon the point of resenting this, when a look from his master as he raised his hand, stayed further assertion of his sense of manliness.

"What am I to understand by this intrusion?" St. Aubyn asked, without rising, or presenting any marked discomposure.

"Well, fust, you knows me, in course?" he said, lodging a low-crowned, battered, and brown old hat under the left arm.

"I have seen you before,—many years ago.—Shut the door, Williams, if you please: you can leave this person with me."

"Oh, yes, you can leave this person with your master, young man; 'tain't the fust time we've bin left alone together!"

And Mr. Beech turned,—turned insolently,—as quits again. Williams sorrowfully obeyed. He was attached, as servants do become, to the hand that feeds and pays liberally.

"Lena, go with Mrs. Brandon, dear, to the music-room; I will rejoin you very shortly."

Mrs. Brandon came gravely, decorously, from the mantel; passed John Beech with a meaning dart from the hard black eyes; and with a low, affectionate "Come, my love!" took the girl's hand to lead her from the room. But Lena was in a sort of daze. From removal of the man's hat, she had never ceased to look at his face, as though trying to remember something,—to trace the flitting shadow of a memory; and it was dreamily, reluctantly, she allowed herself to be conducted from the room.

"How little miss be grown! And seems to remember me, belike!"

St. Aubyn made no reply to this, but began pacing the room irritably: fretting under this new experience of a type to which he was quite unaccustomed.

"You will be good enough to make this interview as short as you can."

"Well, arter comin' two hund'ed an' fifty mile in a horse-box, and clamberin' a fence nigh another two hund'ed an' fifty mile, I ain't likely to cut it short till I've said all I've got to say; or to go, till I've got all I come to get!"

"Perhaps you'll say what that is?"

"Well, it's money,—that's wot for one thing; and purlite treatment,—that's wot for another!"

"The first is soon settled: the second you will find settled also in a summary manner, if you attempt too great familiarity. Therefore, stand upon your guard, and distance!"

"It's threats, is it?" exclaimed Beech, raising his voice. "Oh, come, my fine-feathered master, you'll find that won't do!"

"No noise here, if you please; unless your purpose is to acquaint my household with our business? I think,—all things considered,—we'll talk it over in the garden."

"As you like."

The windows opened on to the lawn; there was, therefore, rapid and noiseless egress. St. Aubyn traversed a side-path, shaded by laurels, leading off from the house to a sufficient distance for unheard conversation, conducted in however high a key.

"Now, sir!"

The master sat on an old clump that looked black as bog-oak in the dense shade; what struggling light there was as yet but making the darkness still more dark. Right away east, however, a great ball of red was rising with gradual splendour, presently to light up the land and sea with silvery fairness.

"Well, of course you thought by securing yourself, and your property, round about like this, to be free of everybody livin', and it's sorry I am to disturb the peace and 'appiness of this charming abode; but bizziness must be attended to, and it was quite by haccident I learnt yer whereabouts. How nice and comfortable you managed things! I might a bin poking about down at Sleperton a good while afore you turned up there, my lord!"

"Silence! Do you not know that title died with the name to which it was attached? When I quitted the world, sir, and gave myself to this cherished project, it was not to play with old memories and old sorrows!"

The tone was so mournful, so inexpressibly sad, even that brutal tormentor paused for an interval.

"Maybe, I may ask, if your experiment has brought the 'appiness expected, sir?"

"Fully! The child under my careful training has changed her whole nature, no one would judge her an offspring of the people; beauty, grace, and many other acquired and cultivated accomplishments help to make her all I could desire. Of her love for myself I will not speak, although it is, of course, the principal matter, but that you would not understand!"

"Don't wrong me," murmured hypocrite in the rough, "you can't tell my feelin's jist now as she stood afore me a-trying her purty memory; I could a-took her to my 'art at that moment and cried, 'Forgive, forgive a father's hagitation!' Only thought you mightn't like it; keeping all so quiet from everybody!"

"What are you doing now, John Beech? You don't appear to be still in the service of that gentleman, the Indian writer; what was his name? I've forgotten."

"Mr. Barnard!" replied John Beech huskily; "No, I've left his service, I'm on my own hook now—"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Opened in bizziness! A shop!"

"Beer, I suppose?"

"Birds!" answered the man dryly, "Canaries and sich-like furren birds; catch 'em over Lea Bridge; shop's in Vinegar Street, Hackney Road, when you're inclined to patronize!"

Lighter became the mist that overhung the sea; all the face of garden and rock was discernible; the two men thus curiously connected became more distinct to each other's view.

"Bird-catching hasn't improved your appearance, I think!"

"That's left for you to do, Mister St. Aubyn,—I want to take a cool five thousand home with me, for bird-seed!"

"That is a large sum, out of all proportion—"

"Not for what you're paying for!" and the little glittering, ferret-like eyes of the extortioner fixed and transfixed his man.

"Let us walk, it is chilly!" and St. Aubyn set up a brisk movement shiveringly, and with nervous twitchings, as though ague had come of that bog-oak.

John Beech assented; he was very adaptable, and decidedly sociable.

"You must quite understand, my good man, I have no time for jesting!"

"Certain and poz it is I'm in little form for fun myself. I mean what I say, and I'll have it or split!"

"Then you stand a fair chance of performing the latter! I beg to inform you once for all, I am not to be intimidated into giving you five thousand pounds to keep for one week a secret you would divulge the next, if the same black mail failed to be forthcoming. When I agreed, or rather desired, to provide for this child, which you then assured me, in compliance with my express stipulation, was the daughter of refined although poor parents,—when I became her guardian—pleased and satisfied with her appearance in every way—and adopted her, having been basely robbed of my own, my honour betrayed, my love foiled, my reputation tarnished;

then I paid to you, and through you, to her parents, the sum of one thousand pounds, and this I was assured by your own lips amply satisfied you all; and especially the people whom you represented as grateful beyond measure at the prospect of their child being so well provided for. Now you speak of the girl as your own; what am I to think?"

"This, Mister St. Aubyn, that if you don't choose to hand me the moderate sum I axed for, I'll have my girl back!"

"That, if she comes of such a viper brood, is the best thing you can do!" And becoming quite angry, St. Aubyn strode away, and gazed vacantly across the wide expanse of water. A world of anguish was betrayed, a breaking heart; but it should break before he lived in life-long fear of a man like this. He had that in his composition which would never tolerate victimizing; he would shoot him first, as one of his sharp-toothed tigers. The pale, handsome face shone with a grand passion. That love of his for Lena, who so innocently supposed herself his own, passed the telling by words. He never paused to ask himself if he could resign her. Had he done so he knew the reply would have miserably weakened his anger. For that love, he had fenced his house about, that she should be wholly and solely his own, that he should be spared a second betrayal in his life, and that her love for him should be disinterested and of the highest type. It should be that of a daughter, until she was of age to hear the revelation from his lips. But this dilemma he was unprepared for; his only fear had been that by some mischance she should see some other, who by newer, fresher charm would weaken his own hold upon her heart. Thus, when he had come upon her on the grass, watching the yacht, it had really been more of a catastrophe and trouble than the ill-timed visit of this man, which, unlike the other, a question of pounds would settle. As a child she had stolen upon his bruised and bleeding heart with a wondrous fascination, and without a shade of pain; that time was all a dream of sweet and playful innocence; but with years came deeper joys and graver pleasures, and he knew a happiness that transcended all he had desired. The girl had beguiled

him of every care, charmed him with merriment, soothed him with tenderness, and in the native graces of her character and her liveliness of disposition he had been contented with her origin; indeed had bestowed at most but a passing thought thereon. To hear this ruffian claim kinship with so bright and beautiful a being was a rude shock, and it chilled St. Aubyn to the soul. Painful experience had made him morbidly sensitive; he knew if this were true he could no longer feel the same warmth of loving interest in her, and such a barrier would be unbearable. Yet he could not disprove it. The man had transacted the whole affair upon a liberal consideration. Lena herself had evident glimmering of an old recollection that *might* be an affectionate one. Horrible!

The red of the great shield was changing to orange, and the garden was flecked with light and shade. They could see the broad expanse of sea cleared of its mist lying calm as a park of primroses in spring. Beech had followed him to the extremity of the walk, where shrubs formed a dusky screen to the bare brink of the precipice.

That very day he had stood at this spot with his darling; beauty beaming from her eyes, blushing from her cheeks, glowing upon her hair, trembling in her voice, the exquisite beauty of childhood. Oh, it was impossible this man could be the father of such a creature! And there by the brink he confronted the man, and took his ground on a firm denial.

"But—I—do not believe your assertion, John Beech; you are no more the parent of that child than is the evil one himself!"

Mr. Beech laughed a hard, dry laugh, there was a rustle amongst the laurels, a withered echo of the dead leaves, a discordant tumbling of earth where the conies frolicked up the cliff.

"Perhaps you'd like me to ask if she remembers anything of that time, Mister St. Aubyn? Or, perhaps you'd like a magistrate's opinion upon yer hiding a 'spectable man's child in a hout o' the way place like this? Take my adwice and pay down with no bother, and I pledge you not to trouble for a long time to come; of course I must see the little gal once in a way!"

"I dispute your right to see her at any time, and you never shall, if I can prevent it—"

"Now look you 'ere, best not make a henemy of me; one's gone an' done it a'ready, wuss luck for him!"

"I have no interest whatever in your quarrels or in anything concerning you—"

"But I have!" The tall form of Noel Barnard here appeared crashing through the laurels. "Your pardon, my lord, for this unceremonious interference! I knew of this scoundrel's designs, and am here to check his infamous audacity. I happen to know the parents of the young lady to whom you've proved so generous a benefactor, and beg to assure you their station, or that of her mother, is, emphatically, of rank equal with your own; one day I may be in a position to enlighten you further!"

"Thanks, Mr. Barnard, you are indeed a friend in need; your sometime servant was pinning me in a corner!"

"So I see," and the singular man cast a rapid glance at their dangerous proximity to the verge; then turning authoritatively to Beech, who had several times essayed to speak, and was apparently charged with a volume of exposure, said,—

"Leave the premises—as you entered!"

"Never, till I've the money—"

"Be careful—"

"I am, Mister Noel Barnard, and saving, and—I allus pays my debts!"

"Then pay this, Beech!" and without more ado, and with a giant's grasp, he hurled the man forward, down, through the shrubs, over the brink of the precipice. St. Aubyn stood horror-stricken, if relieved, at the summary judgment. These men were sportsmen; both had scoured the jungles and been in at many a death; but this incident, on his own property, was very repulsive to St. Aubyn.

"Couldn't have done it myself!" he remarked sententiously.

"Thought I might have occasion!" replied the other coolly, turning down his cuffs. "How's the tide?" leaning

over. "A yacht yonder; yours?"—pointing out the vessel just gliding again into sight.

"No!" said St. Aubyn, with a shudder, "but come in; permit me to renew an acquaintance made in India, such as it was—"

"You are kind! I think I will as it's late; perhaps your housekeeper could shake me up a bed—be off by sunrise—very pleased to have been of service. I thought I should. That old rock served admirably; quite a Tarpeian sensation for that miserable parent. A most unprincipled fellow, who will be missed only in the lowest purlieus of our over-crowded metropolis. Front of your house, I presume? Quite a regal building. I congratulate you very much;—light upstairs—Miss—St. Aubyn? Retiring probably—very good—early hours—healthy and wealthy and wise!"

A shadow crossed the blind.

"My daughter's companion, Mrs. Brandon!"

"Brandon—Brandon—bless me—name's familiar—highly pleased to see the amiable members of your household, I'm sure,—meet so many people who are not amiable.—Long journey, hope you'll excuse travelling costume. What's this, jessamine? My favourite plant, as I live!"

He had placed himself as though he also would take root, hands on hips, strong and tree-like, but gnarled and of uncomely growth. Their voices had been heard, the window-sash of the music-room was thrown up, the thick curtain drawn aside, and there, in front of the twinkle of tapers, and colour, and gleaming, stood Lena, the faint beam of the young moon pale upon her brow.

"Oh, Pa, dear, what a time you've been, I thought you were never coming!"

"Ve-ry pretty, ve-ry!" Mr. Barnard spoke hoarsely.

"Yes, I planted it the first year of our coming!" While Mr. Barnard bobbed his head beneath it, eyes all aslant on Somebody's daughter.

They passed to the drawing-room, and the master rang the bell. The visitor nodded pleasantly to Williams.

"I stood a fair chance of not being admitted; your faithful

fellow seems watchful as Cerberus; it was not until I partly disclosed my business that he would raise the portcullis."

"Supper, Williams—the best our larder will provide. We are so unaccustomed to those social honours—visits, that I am afraid the best is but poor!" Addressed to the visitor, who was sitting with his long legs stretched out, leisurely examining some Indian photographs.

"Funny old place, this Buddhist digging. I was fishing off Elephanta; 'Ever done the Temple?' said one of the party, some had, some hadn't; agreed to make for the caves; cool, sandy, and swarming with blear-eyed snakes; I took a drawing of that expressive ancient Siva and his cobra also. Some thief stole my gold pencil-case, and a gnat as long as a scorpion stung the tip of my nose—ah, Miss St. Aubyn, I presume—delighted I'm sure!" And he arose with much courtliness to the advance of the beautiful girl: his back to the light, his face to the shadow, holding forth a long, sinewy hand that looked as if it had come up white from stretching on the rack; it was the only part of him on which the light shone, and it was a weird part, like a reptile in marble, or, a corner chipped off somebody's sepulchre. Instead of taking the hand, Miss St. Aubyn stood transfixed by the shadowy face. Then she crossed to Papa watching this by-play wonderingly, and she whispered to him, Mr. Barnard recoiling his hand into the recesses of its cuff,—

"That's the face I've seen so often in my dreams. What does it mean, Papa, why should I dream of him, why is he here,—where is the other dreadful man?"

Mr. St. Aubyn was confused. He said aloud,—

"My little girl has a faint recollection of your face, Mr. Barnard. My love, a very old friend of—of our family!"

"Oh, ve-ry!" and Mr. Barnard chirped soothingly to one of the stuffed birds. "Why, on my honour, thought it was alive—how art deceives one!"

Mrs. Brandon entered quietly, and with much composure walked across the room, taking up her work as though but that instant laid down.

"Mr. Barnard—Mrs. Brandon!"

He rose and ceremoniously bowed: she arose and ceremo-

niously courtesied: they sat down again, and the lady resumed her sewing.

Then Williams appeared:—

"Supper is served, sir, in the breakfast-room!" They generally supped there; it was smaller and more cosy. Mr. St. Aubyn gave his arm to his daughter, Mr. Barnard stopped behind an instant; he was scrutinizing a work of elaborately-carved leather nailed on one of the panels. Then he gracefully turned; "Ah—beg pardon!" and offering an arm to Mrs. Brandon, the procession moved on.

"What a wretch you are!" she whispered to him playfully, pinching his arm; they were crossing the hall of many woods; he smiled upon the quiet woman—smiled down on her, for he was so tall, an august smile, false as the glimmer upon those far-reaching cedars.

It was an elegant repast, despite there being nothing in the house, and Williams, all decorum, stood behind his master's chair, attentive as the first of the school of St. James's. It was so very pleasant now that the moon was high and unclouded, Miss St. Aubyn begged the shutters and curtains might be drawn aside.

"Are you not a little afraid of the chilliness, my love?" and St. Aubyn looked restlessly in the direction of the hidden garden.

"I believe it is a dry air to-night—very pleasant!" and Mr. Barnard assisted Mrs. Brandon to a little jelly.

St. Aubyn nodded permission, and the man unclosed the casement. The master's hound came smelling round Mr. Barnard and growled:—exit hound by way of the window.

"Miss St. Aubyn, may I pass you some jelly?" He was wonderfully polite, not in the least strained; it was all natural.

"I suppose the great world stands where it did, Mr. Barnard?"

"You allude to the fashionable world—Oh, very much so! Plenty stirring!"

"What is the government—it's five years, I think, since I saw an English newspaper!"

"Bless me! Is it possible? No interest in politics?"

"Not the slightest; it would be the last thing I should occupy five minutes over. What say you, Mrs. Brandon?"

"A grand science, Mr. St. Aubyn!" and the quiet woman laid a knife down carefully and without noise, and a fork as gently, and crossed a spoon to the pattern of the damask as though evolving a problem.

"Ah; wait till you're grey-haired, my dear sir, you're bound to come to it in the latter days!"

"If I waited until then, I should give preference to the Church, and leave care of the State to younger men!"

"Very good—I was intended for the Church myself—'bound to be a bishop,' said my father. My mother had my night-gowns made of lawn, and would have me stand in front of her every evening before bed, reading the burial service from the Prayer Book—"

Here some confusion was caused by the hound running in with an old brown hat, low-crowned, and much battered. Williams having removed this with the tongs, order was restored.

"You were just at an entertaining point of your history, Mr. Barnard, pray continue."

"To be sure—going to tell you—may I trouble you for the cayenne, Mrs. Brandon? Many thanks. Finding my prejudices biased in favour of the bar, that idea was abandoned in the forensic interest—I forget if I practised to any large extent, and the memoranda of that early period were consumed at a fire, where I lost a lot of property and valuable documents. Let's see, wasn't I connected with the law when I knew you at Calcutta? Dear me, no, I was editing the *Nabob*, and a pretty mess I made of it; took the rice and indigo side too: disposed of all the valuable plant, and returned to England; one wants to be thoroughly unprincipled to—to—Shall I help you to a little curry, it *is* curry, I think? Bless my soul; it's sweet sauce! Well, I think I must—beg pardon!—What's that?"

All listened, Williams stood silent; the steel cold eyes of Mrs. Brandon darted to the face of Noel Barnard, played an instant, and stole back. St. Aubyn placed a hand to his ear and, painfully intent, listened with hearing at its utmost

tension. Lena trifled with her wine-glass, and wondered what had come to the people. It was heard again, the shout of some person in extremity, afar, they could scarcely tell the direction, then all was still; Mr. Barnard paring a slice of cheese,—

"Fisherman to his mate probably—dangerous coast!"

Mrs. Brandon here rose from the table, praying her departure might be pardoned;—a troublesome headache to which she was subject these warm months.

"Thunder in the air!" said Mr. Barnard, with much gallantry, opening the door for the lady to pass forth. He knew as well as possible she had been playing him false. He knew by that shout John Beech had escaped: that separately or together, these two would henceforth be toiling to enmesh him! He knew their counter-schemes would ere long be many, that the hunters would press him sore. From afar he scented battle, and laughed the foe to scorn; the chase had ever thrilled him with wild ardour; this promised to be exciting, this war with high and low society. He knew Beresford Travers, Garston, and Co., were endeavouring to check-mate him on the great intrigue-board. Yet it was no vulgar adventurer they and others were tracking and seeking to outwit; they were conscious of this, and paid him the compliment. And while in a variety of quarters men and women were working to entoil the schemer, he coolly returned to his seat to—enjoy the liberal evening repast at the house on the cliff? The old vintages removed from an older mansion, where cellars dated from the accession of Hanover? Nay, but privately to feast eyes and hearing upon the beauty of Somebody's daughter.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DRAMATIC READING AT THE PAVILION.

THREE of them, selected for the invariable glossiness of their appearance and persuasive manners, had waited upon the Rev. Westley Garland to solicit his aid and interest for the charity they represented—a fashionable charity, well sustained by the polite, on whom was neither spot nor blemish. And there had been discussion as to whether some one of more established principles would not do as well for the purpose they had in view (he had been seen suspiciously near to a Methodist's house only the day before). But no, there was not a reader in the church as popular or as likely to replenish their exchequer. So they waited upon him, sent up word "a deputation," and three cards on the waiter; and stood just within the little drawing-room, each with a hat behind him, feeling important and conscious of their authority, and pluming for the impressive. Servant came down. Mr. Garland would see the gentlemen. Would they walk this way? They walked, stood in the presence of the great reader, were requested to take seats, and did so. One put hat under chair, one on knee; the third, as of bolder type, would place it on the table, but, not finding space, for books, extinguished, with characteristic taste, an exquisite statuette.

"We are sorry to trouble you, Mr. Garland, knowing how valuable your time is (the preacher courteously waved his hand, as signifying no trouble), myself and friends desire to apologize for this intrusion ("myself and friends" nod heads as conscious of the intrusion), which we feel convinced, with

your uniform goodness, you will condone in recollection of our high and philanthropic object."

The foreman had spoken this little bit before his toilet-glass until perfect. His colleagues looked on with mute admiration. One of them blew a nose accustomed to over-awe a Board of Guardians.

"To what cause am I indebted, gentlemen, for the honour of your visit? Your names are familiar to me in connexion with town matters."

"Oh, precisely! We have had the honour many years; myself—I say it with diffidence—almost a lifetime. I am Mr. Bubb. My dear friends here, respectively, Mr. Lurch (Mr. Lurch stands up, glossy and smiling); you have heard of Lurch's far-famed Tonic Ale, I am sure, sir? (Mr. Garland bows politely, yet a little distantly; he opines it is a commercial visit). And Mr. Ebenezer Wriggle (Mr. Wriggle stands up, glossy and smiling), the name is known to you?—Old Mr. Wriggle did much for our town; he was upon—in fact, upon everything; his son is a worthy successor. I have the honour to introduce to you Mr. Ebenezer, sole surviving representative of the firm—Pickles, sir, and Fish Sauce! (Mr. Garland bows still more distantly; the party is not much to his taste.) We may as well announce at once the honoured purpose of our visit, of which you should have been favoured with a notice, but owing to some extraordinary oversight of our secretary's, the communication was omitted until too late, and (smiling) here we are! (Mr. Wriggle looks across to Mr. Lurch as indicating a happy hit.) We are, so to speak, ambassadors, Mr. Garland. We are here on behalf of the Mariners' Provident Association; patrons, the Duke of Mainwaring, the Earl of Comdarlington, Lord Pepper, the Hon. Frederic Glover, the Duchess of Mainwaring, the Countess of Comdarlington, Lady Pepper, the Hon Mrs. Glover and Miss Glover; and many other patronesses of high standing. My wife, Mrs. Bubb, has the distinguished honour of acting as correspondent of the Ladies' Committee. Mrs. Bubb would have waited upon you to-day with us, only we imagined it scarcely consistent with the etiquette observable; but I have brought Mrs. Bubb's

photograph; you will permit me to introduce Mrs. Bubb to your notice? I am only sorry our religious opinions differ, or we would unite with you in the inspiriting worship of one beneficent Creator at your church. (And the foreman takes a slant look over to his brethren in search of encouragement; but Mr. Lurch is looking very surly, while the other is watching a fly upon the ceiling. Then Mr. Bubb plunges.) We have called, sir, to solicit your most generous co-operation (Mr. Garland unlocks a small drawer of escritoire). No, sir, not that! (with dignity as resenting the mercenary.) It is by means of a Reading, from the Poets and Humourists, or some original composition of your own, that you can help us. The Music-room, Royal Pavilion, is at our disposal, but experience has proved the capacity of the room to be inadequate to the public demand for admission upon occasion of your readings, Mr. Garland: it is, therefore, the intention of the committee, upon happily securing your sanction, to engage the Dome, which, upon pressure, will accommodate three thousand persons; half the area we propose to issue guinea tickets for, the remainder half a guinea; gallery, five shillings!" The preacher smiled wearily, yet kindly.

"You are welcome to my services; but do you suppose Brighton is to be so exorbitantly taxed for hearing a man read?"

"It is generally admitted, Mr. Garland, a guinea is not too much for the pleasure of hearing you read: the end justifies the figure." And Josiah Bubb, Silk Mercer, looked as though he had said a very clever thing over a remnant.

"Perhaps you would favour us at your convenience with a draft of the pieces to be read, for the advertisements?"

"Must advertise, I suppose, Mr. Bubb?" asked the clergyman pleasantly.

"Can't do anything without it in a public way!"

(Chorus of Tonic Ale, Pickles, and Silk.)

"I think you gave me the option of something original? I have two or three dramatic selections written some time ago, by which I set affectionate store; as these will be quite fresh, they will, perhaps, please better than the oft-read, well-

known pieces. For a guinea your audience will expect something new, Mr. Bubb."

Thus, all being settled, the deputation retired, highly gratified with the result of the visit.

They proceeded at once to the Curator's residence, to ascertain forthcoming engagements, and to secure the magnificent hall.

Then three heads were put together in the Mercer's office, and a production concocted, which, after being submitted to several highly critical opinions, and weighed and considered in various bearings, and revised and amended in others, broke upon the startled town in this wise:—

DOME,

ROYAL PAVILION, BRIGHTON.

DRAMATIC READING,

BY THE

REV. WESTLEY GARLAND,

IN AID OF

THE MARINERS' PROVIDENT ASSOCIATION.

On Thursday, July 30th; at Eight o'clock.

Admission: Reserved Seats, One Guinea; Area, Half Guinea; Outer Circle and Balcony, Five Shillings. Tickets of the Secretaries, of Messrs. Cramer, and at the Doors.

"It's neat and to the point," said Mr. Bubb, as he stood at the Pavilion gates before one of the announcements. "Good wine needs no bush. We shall have a bumper!"

So it proved, at least in perspective, the whole of the reserved tickets being exhausted on the day of issue; and Mr.

Bubb and his colleagues had even slyly despoiled the next five rows. The rush for these, if more leisurely, was not less cordial. It was evident great interest had been aroused,—the pleasantest anticipations excited. Nobody cared very much for the Provident Association, but Westley Garland happened to be the idol. Had the idol been broken, and sixpence wanted to repair the breakage, nobody would have found one for the purpose.

Mr. Blake, upon hearing of the Reading, wrote Mrs. Blake as follows :—

My dear Margaret,

Having a budget of news, I snatch half an hour to tell you how we are going on. Business is quiet. Dr. Hollroyd in yesterday, says the town is very dull, none of his people are back. Spite of which, they've induced Mr. Garland to risk a Reading ; it comes off on the 30*th, to-morrow week. Mr. Garland himself called, very politely, and brought tickets for you, me, and Rose, for which I am sure he paid three guineas. Just like him to do so. He inquired particularly how you and Pet were, and when you thought of returning; and if I was writing I was to kindly tell my little girl he has a pair of love-birds for her. Very thoughtful, I'm sure. You will be surprised to hear Lady Guilmere is recovering rapidly. There is something mysterious about this. She was given over by her own medical men and those from town, when Mr. Garland commenced daily visits, sometimes twice a day. (I learn this from her footman.) Improved symptoms set in, and her Ladyship's condition bettered daily and hourly. (I learn this from the maid.) And now her Ladyship is rapidly approaching convalescence. Between you and me, (and this is strictly private, better not to mention it before Rose,)—I shouldn't be surprised if Mr. Garland and her Ladyship make a match of it. But you will be looking for my fashionable news. Well, first and foremost, Brighton will have its Queen, or I should write Empress, this coming Autumn. Anything more superb, as you will say, has never been seen in the South, or any other part, for that matter. She only arrived from Paris yesterday.*

They have quite a retinue. Some of the servants are darkies, and I understand their luggage has Indian labels on in plenty, with Benares, Dacca, Poonah, Baroda, Lahore, Agra, Nagpoor, Mirzapoor, Tanjore, Allahabad, Rampore, and Calcutta. (I had this from one of the hotel servants,—they are staying at the Bedford until their house is prepared. Grundens are talked of as the furnishers.) The future leader of our fashions, and we shall know what style is this season, is Lady Helen Darrell, of Darrell Abbey; a place somewhere in the Lake district, which has been closed during some years' absence abroad. (One of the chamber-maids told me this, she had it of her Ladyship's maid, or one of them, for there seem to be half a dozen.) They were going on to Cheltenham, and may do so yet, something at the last moment having altered her Ladyship's designs. I am told she is capricious, passionate, and violent; but I saw nothing of this the time she was in the shop (for we have been honoured thus early). Came in with most imperious majesty, sweeping from the carriage. Velvet dress of dense crimson, and an elegant wrap of some sort. Not a scrap of ornament; no jewellery. Haven't time to write you more description, but hope you will soon be home to see this paragon. The Reading will be a good opportunity. Sure to be there. I'm told she goes to everything. There is an elderly man in attendance, as dry as an old walnut, of whom nobody takes any notice, and Lady Darrell cursorily alludes to him as 'his Lordship.' He is believed to be her father.

But I must be closing. Smith being out for his holiday, I am rather tied. We are managing indifferently well in the house. The girl will not learn how to cook a steak, I suspect, if we keep her another ten years.

Tell Rose I shall expect lots of sea-weed and pretty shells. No doubt you are enjoying yourselves finely; I quite envy you the cool breezes on the sands. It is dreadfully hot here. I take my constitutional every morning over the Downs.

With love to yourself and Rose, and kisses to both,

Your affectionate husband,

JOSEPH BLAKE.

P.S. Will meet you in Town any day you appoint for your return, and we will take a stroll round the Yard to look at the shops. Tell Pet she has not written me even one little note this time.

Of course the popular preacher heard of the unprecedented rush for the tickets, and, as a matter of fact, it moved him not one jot or tittle; and not a quarter as gratefully as would have done an orphan's broken thanks, a widow's tearless gratitude. Where the committee worked for their own honour and glory, and the public paid to hear a great orator, the man himself, perhaps, was the only individual sympathizer with the destitute Mariners.

"It ought to be a treat, my love, for he is a most accomplished reader. I assure you Society is quite at his feet."

Thus Lady Comdarlington to Lady Pepper, and of a man who estimated their race and class as of very slight value; of a man with a broken heart, whose life was devoted purely to aiding the troubled; a man to whom adulation was as smoke, and the symbol of applause a weather-vane; who would have read as faultlessly beneath the sky on the beach, to the fishermen, as to the aristocratic flock the magic of his genius drew about him.

He listened to no party feeling ever, but was hand-in-hand with each in all Christian charity, and when the vulgar aired their audacity by such comments as, "We are only sorry our religious opinions differ, or we would unite with you in the inspiriting worship of one beneficent Creator at your church," he would smile very kindly, wondering a little, but not angered, and would have joined in their own service an hour afterwards with much willingness.

The same evening he despatched his letter to Mrs. Blake, the chemist, busy in his shop, saw Mr. Garland's carriage stop. He noticed the gentleman looked wearied, and paler than ordinary.

"Good evening, friend; I hope it is well with you?"

"Very well, sir. I am sorry you are not looking over strong."

"To tell the truth, my rest has been disturbed. I seldom know what it is to sleep in proper hours. I shall surprise you when I say I often see the sun rise from your Dyke after a stolen night march over the Downs."

Joseph Blake looked with pitying interest at this singular man who possessed a mysterious sorrow that, if it embittered his own life, rendered him irresistibly fascinating to others. The chemist had often speculated over Mr Garland's age; it was as great a mystery as the rest of the surroundings; it might be thirty, it was as likely to be sixty. The Minister's servants were the only retainers in the habit of being sent to the shop from whom Mr. Blake could extract nothing relative to their master.

"I thought it very likely you studied at night, sir; but I was quite unprepared to hear that you made such pilgrimages. However, you know a pleasure few enjoy; after the long night walk the sunrise, from that point, must be doubly magnificent."

"You are right; it is the preparation by night for the after-joy." And for an instant a curious expression flitted over the preacher's face. Mr. Blake was not versed in this form of prescription, and attributed it to the flutter of his striped blind.

"I want you to send me some more arrowroot, as before, at your convenience."

The chemist bowed, and the preacher took up a silver-topped vinaigrette.

"Mrs. Blake is quite well, I hope? Still a truant, I suppose?" smiling, and inhaling the pungent aroma.

"I wrote my wife only this morning, and mentioned your kindness in presenting us with the tickets. We shall look forward to the Reading with eagerness. I meet my wife in town one day next week. Mrs. Blake isn't very fond of travelling by herself, but my assistant is away, and I cannot spare the time."

Mr. Garland flushed. Flutter of the blind again.

"I shall be in town myself next week. Will you permit me to run down to Scaborough and escort Mrs. Blake and

your little girl home? It is dangerous journeying about unprotected, for ladies and children, in these excursion times. Nay, it won't be trespassing upon my time or my kindness, it is myself that will be indebted to you; the little exertion will prove beneficial. Is it a bargain, Mr. Blake?"

"Certainly, if you wish it; and I don't know how to thank you enough."

So by the next post Joseph Blake wrote again, in this wise:—

Mr. Garland has just been in; goes to London next week, and will be pleased to run down and see you home. Get Pet to persuade him to take her round the West-end for the shops. Write me the day you propose returning.

The reply came on the 24th; it was in the child's writing, characteristic and sweet, enclosing a tiny *billet* for Mr. Garland:—

Dear Papa,

I've asked Ma if I may write to you, and Ma says Yes, and she's glad to get off the job. And I'm staying in this morning, instead of going a-paddling, as I meant, and I'm all alone. So you'll know I've written this all myself, won't you, dear Papa? Ma has taken her knitting down to the beach, where she works in the shade of the bathing machines, while a gentleman who's very polite, round at the Hotel, and whose name on the card is "Sir Charles Neville," reads to Ma, and seems very attentive; only you mustn't tell Ma I said so, because she told me "you needn't talk about it before your Pa!" He's very kind to me, and buys sweets; but I don't like him. I like Lorry Vincent a little bit; he always lives here; we play on the beach; and I'm down-right fond of his Ma—but I love only you and Mr. Garland (after you, dear); and I love him dreadfully. I am so glad he is coming for us, and I couldn't help writing to say so. I do hope he won't be angry. Ma wished me to say, if agreeable to Mr. Garland, Monday or Tuesday would suit her very well. And no more at present from

Your affectionate little girl,

NELLY ROSE BLAKE.

Mr. Blake smiled good-humouredly, felt pleased that his wife was being so well entertained, thought, probably Mr. Garland would be amused by both the little notes, and sent them on, together with this explanation:—

Dear Sir,

Have received enclosed from my daughter, which you will make all allowance for.

With respects, yours very faithfully,

JOSEPH BLAKE.

He was in the dingy little study; tomes and folios on walls and floor; all the grey, grim retinue of Fathers, from which he had tried, and so unsuccessfully, to glean a little light and comfort. Old volumes like the immortal steed, bare-backed and harum-scarum; standard works of reference, like a tier of cousins three times removed; dingy maps, as displaying the dry and dusty nature of the earth; a bust or two of some cross-grained philosophers who had, seemingly, become petrified in their frowning studies; and a portrait over the mantelpiece of his predecessor; grave, firm, with little of the over-flowing human sympathy this man was possessed of. He was busy writing, with the industry of a merchant's clerk, close-lined foolscap, a table of the sheets; it was currently rumoured he realized a considerable income by his writings; and then arose the question propounded by some busybody, what did he do with his money? He must be wealthy, if popularity on the page, the pulpit, and the platform spelt wealth; and yet he had never been known to make investment; so they abandoned their unsuccessful inquiry, and settled it he was amassing money on the sly. It came to him with the rest in a circuitous sort of way, he met it with a kind and gentle smile, and evidently did not think it of very great importance. When Mr. Blake's big blue envelope was placed upon the table beside him, he, not recognizing the handwriting, placed it a little aside, and continued his theme; some dull, uninteresting subject his facile pen was translating to colour and poetry; and he went on thus with indomitable zeal and unceasing weariness at heart, until the tired eyes lifted, longing for something to light

upon that might refresh and *recall;* and indifferently, almost unthinkingly, he opened the letter, read the accompanying line, the child's letter, and held the note inscribed to himself tremblingly; and with a gasping, half eagerness, half pain, another being started by this simple thing to quivering life. Some flowers fell out, wild flowers, dry by transit, yet odorous still of hedge-rows and country ways; flowers before had never seemed as sweet. This with them :—

Dear Mr. Garland,

I cannot write my gladness that you are coming; I shall not sleep till then for thinking of it. But you must not bring us home directly, because there are some lovely walks I want to take you, chiefly to Sleperton Woods, which you will like wonderfully. I send a few flowers I have gathered for you; with my love and kisses.

Your affectionate little friend,

NELLY ROSE.

And now this grave and stately Minister does a singular thing. From a private drawer he takes a small pocket-book, from an inner pocket a letter, surely a fac-simile, flowers and love and kisses; the writing perhaps not as regular, as indicative of model school tuition, yet a sweet impromptu little note; and now—is this the mighty elocutionist whose voice will thrill that assembly of the great hall of the Alhambra, this the preacher men and women stand in aisles for every Sabbath? Tears! Ah, well, none of the race are by. He places the notes together, and writes on. Calmly, thoughts stealing off now and again, but held in and under like the restive horses of a tandem.

On the Monday he went down to Scaborough, arrived by that evening train, and had barely alighted before two little hands took his, two lips pouted for the greeting kiss, two eyes shone lustrously a joyful welcome, and—

"How good to come! Nobody knows I'm here to meet you. Ma's walking with the company where the band is playing. Oh! I am so glad you've come! May I take that bag, Mr. Garland? Do let me carry it!"

"Too heavy, pretty one. What is the hotel called? Not the best, the second best?"

"Sea View!"

"Then this good fellow will take on my bag, and we will follow, for I have something for you within; and I shall be glad of a wash and brush, after which you will take me one of those pretty walks, I am sure."

Rose leaped and clapped her hands; this was her ambition.

In due time the treasures were unpacked; beautiful boxes, books, and other things dear to girlhood; and last of all a doll dressed all in the best, and this, by wish of the generous donor, the little lady was to nurse and have up to the table while he had his tea. They were all to themselves, and, although hotel accommodation, it was the most homelike tea-table the man had sat down to for—a very long time, it seemed, over that sigh.

"Well, little girl, and which walk am I to be taken this evening?"

"Oh, the best; it may rain to-morrow!"

"Is that the one you called—"

"Sleperton!"

"Is there not a Sleperton Manor?"

"Just the house I want to show you; it *is* a curious place. Have you then heard of it?"

"Years, years ago, I knew its owner!" And the Minister had lapsed so thoughtful, little Rose delicately forbore to speak. Silently she led him towards the picturesque village. Some who passed them looked back at the tall companion of the pretty child they had seen on Seaborough beach.

"Is there no more quiet way, Rose, whereby we can escape these people and the dust? I never like a long, straight road!"

"By the fields it is farther, but ever so much pleasanter!"

"By the fields then we will go!" And they set forth by way of a stile, and along a path edging the fast ripening corn; poppies peeped forth and blue corn-flowers played at hide and seek; and the little girl must make a small chaste bunch of such garner-bloom and present to him, with a

"Mr. Garland stretched beside her."—PAGE 93.

kiss. She did not want to stick it in his hat or button-hole, or any other vantage-point, but gave it quietly and with much good taste, arranged within the confines of one of his old letters, and therein he kept it for the time being. The field sloped to a brook where a plank and hand-rail served for a rustic bridge; forget-me-nots grew here and reeds; dragon-flies skimmed the water, their last minuet before the sun-setting; cows were browsing in the opposite meadows; woods girdled the prospect; it was all a fair English picture of still life, and yet within hearing of the shrill neigh of the iron horse.

"Wouldn't you like to live here always—as quiet as this? I would!"

"Yes, little Rose, yes—some—day—perhaps!"

"How thoughtful you are, Mr. Garland! This walk makes *you* sad; now I enjoy it to-night, *so* much."

"I only meant by my words, dear child, that man has his allotted day for work; then come the eventide and rest!"

"It is evening now!" said Rose demurely; "We will rest!" and by way of example she sat down upon the close-cropped grass. Mr. Garland stretched beside her; it was long since he had indulged in such luxurious movements; an expression of infinite tenderness over-spread his face, and again that quivering of the lip that at times made the face so extremely beautiful, when within his study, and seen by no mortal eye.

"I am going to show you a picture—the last time I looked upon it, it was—an evening like this—"

"An evening of a journey?"—The face turned from the sunset as though its splendour filled him with pain.

"The evening of a journey—a long journey!" He was unfolding it with terrible care, from layer and layer of fine paper. It was a miniature, very delicately painted, of a little girl, like and yet unlike; this rendered patrician and ethereal.

A mist passed before his eyes, and for a time the sweet face looked from out a cloud.

The little girl gazed on the picture enraptured.

"How beautiful! how beautiful!"

He restored it to his pocket, and they resumed their walk without speaking. Rose asked no question, she had seen

her friend overcome by some great sorrow; it was sacred to her, and he gained of this child a mute sympathy and understanding perhaps neither man nor woman would have given.

Along the hedge-side path of a field of oats, the sway of their graceful heads reaching away to the woods, a soothing rhythm to the boding outline of the dense perspective.

"These are Sleperton Woods!" as they entered. The Minister removed his hat; it was impressive coming out of glare of the sun-flushed fields: like entering a cathedral; but so gloomy that the child started.

"I haven't been this walk for a week, and then it was in the morning. Had we better go on, Mr. Garland?"

Their eyes becoming accustomed to the dim light they went on; he, as we know, was in the habit of taking gloomy walks. To cheer her he commenced to talk of Brighton, of his Reading; how strange seemed the contrast! That Dome crowded with rank, wealth, fashion, with Society, and this still, shady retreat, where the wood-pecker and the squirrel alone awoke the echoes of the vault, and balcony, and many-peopled area.

"You say you like to hear me read on the Sunday, Rose?"

"I always close my eyes and listen with all my heart!"

He smiled at the quaint expression.

"This will be something fresh, it is a—"

Further remark was for the time intruded upon by their passing into an open,—an oasis of high grass and neglected growth; where long ago, when the Lord of the Manor was here, trees had been felled in plenty; but since then given up to the vagrants, it lying on the right of way. Reuben Smith, the bailiff, was not over strict in such matters; indeed the gipsies had been noticed prowling suspiciously near to the house without molestation; a camp of this people now occupied the level.

It has been explained how Westley Garland was one with the outcast of every kind, and he could not pass the circle of wanderers around their fire without a kindly word. They looked up suspiciously. Two or three, noticing the

Minister's neckcloth, removed their hats, with reverence or superstition.

"What tribe is this, my friends, wishing ye well and God speed?"

A young man amongst them arose upon a signal, and with strongly guttural *patois* replied for the company,—

"We are Jael-Ishmael's, the stars o'er-shadow and prosper his remaining years."

"I have heard of your chief, a man of wisdom: others nearer my own country have spoken of him. My name may not be unknown to your tribe; I am aware secret communication exists between your people over the whole land relative to their friends and their enemies. I am Westley Garland!"

At the name the whole company bared the head, many arose; old women, sitting remote under the trees smoking their pipes by themselves, came forward with a flowing dialect the people alone understood, but with a kind expression of countenance that lent rough charm to their swarthy faces. Sturdy men crouched alongside their asses, stretched, yawned, and joined the group; beautiful black-eyed ruddy-cheeked boys crept up, and girls bobbed from under the tent and hooped cart; the flickering glare of the fire in the centre imparting colours to their brown skins that the old Dutch painters would have seen with enthusiasm.

"Your name is known to us!" replied the young man, dignified and respectfully. The Minister scattered some silver amongst the children, shook hands with the young man, and when he had said a kind word to most,—

"We are going to have a look at the Manor, and we shall return by the road, therefore, we are not likely to see you again. Good evening!"

The young man drew the Minister a little on one side; he had something to communicate,—

"If you meet Jael-Ishmael, for he is yonder—an old patriarch of the silver beard—be upon guard; our people are your friends, Jael-Ishmael is your foe!"—And, as having said no more when pointing the direction of the Manor than intimating the nearest approach, the young man fell quietly

back into his place upon the moss, and commenced to smoke. Startled, perhaps a little annoyed, Mr. Garland walked quickly on, the child's warm hand lying tremulous as a bird in his; for its owner shared the timidity of children when too close upon the nomads. Why on earth or under the stars Jael-Ishmael should be his foe, puzzled the good Minister exceedingly.

They came upon the house long after the last flushing of ruby on the stone griffins at the gates; the tangle of flowers had folded their petals and presented an array of spears as though guarding the quiet domain. Italian terraces part crumbled, and everywhere clustered thick with creepers, ivy, and wild convolvulus. A great stone basin and bronze fountain, the dolphins maned with bind-weed, the lizards leasing the stone for an amphitheatre. Nymphs, Fauns, Satyrs, Cupids, Parcæ, more dressed than since their creation; a green spun drapery veiling the figures, as though the garden really couldn't stand it, now left to itself. Arbours so netted over, entrance was impossible. Garden seats, mouldy, rotten, despairing; having waited so many years for somebody's patronage, and fallen down at last upon the high grass of the lawn.

The vulgar of the village said that if ever Lord Lindon did return, Old Smith, the bailiff, would catch it!

Reuben was *not* popular. He had a mill,—people would not send their corn, preferring one four miles away; but out of bravado, when the wind was right, Reuben set the mill going and ground for the poor at quarter-price. If nobody sent, he would set the sails going all the same. Reuben said his Lordship would never return, and it was "Nowt use trimming up the garden for the village to stare at."

So Lorry Vincent had a delightfully romantic time of it in the big garden, and his pale Mamma moved curiously amongst the deserted wealth, appearing in all sorts of unlikely corners, and always seeming to have one of her bright, cautious eyes over her shoulder, on the alert for anything.

Mr. Garland had been contemplating it for some minutes in silence and with sadness. It touched a chord in his own experience, perhaps. Then his little companion said,—

"What do you think of it, sir? Is it not a curious place?"

"Not more so than one would suppose, having been unoccupied so long!"

Passing round to the back, they saw a window open.

"Oh, I should like to see inside; I've heard of such beautiful pictures!"

"I do not expect we shall be trespassing very seriously if we do look through a room or two, but there is scarcely light enough for pictures!"

And they entered, trod dust thicker than carpets of the loom, and stood amazed at the loftiness of the hall in which they found themselves. A great lantern with coloured divisions, bearing mediæval subjects of knightly interest, was there suspended, and would light both the hall, grand staircase, and corridors above; it was encrusted with dust and woven of cobwebs. Chairs had the crest of the Lindons carved upon the backs, and a shield facing the principal entrance bore the emblazoned arms of the family. Right and left were doors, and peeping in they saw gold and crimson velvet papering, where the dust had lodged a design never contemplated by the draughtsman; and paintings upon the walls—Eastern art chiefly—landscapes crimsoned with mighty redness, as by heat; sand tracts, glowing skies, and little water; luscious fruit and great sensuous flowers that seemed swooning in the sun; pagodas and temples of arabesque with the palm drooping to the chalice of the lotus, as by wan thirst: and a crowd of flowers, oleander, arctotis, hyssop, magnolia, passion, tamarisk, orange, and cactus, lying with faint petals curled hot against the walls. Over the chimney-piece, so placed the twilight crept up to the grand face, was a portrait with HELEN, LADY LINDON, upon the gilt of the massive frame. It was not Westley Garland's style of beauty—too imperious and haughty a type—but he looked on it with interest, for from her came the sorrow of the Lindons; and the defiant, queenly beauty, dark it seemed as Cleopatra's, filled the chamber with a lurid light that drove back the redness of the East, and left the landscapes pale in their obtrusive glare. Or it might be the deepening of the twilight. It was becoming so shadowy in

the silent house, the little girl begged to be taken away. They walked, as it were, with muffled footsteps, not an echo seemed to disturb the deadness. A flight of three steps, and the open door of a conservatory of capacious size that had sometime opened to the garden. They stood and looked through the glass an instant. Then did Westley Garland start back as though stung by an adder. Through the glass he was confronted by a face, a truly patriarchal and most venerable countenance, with long locks of silver, and a beard that trailed down to below the girdle; a vagrant costume, over which an old cloak, the garment once worn by elderly men; a palmer hat, and a long staff which the figure was too erect and commanding to lean upon. It was the revered chief of the gipsies, spoken of by name as Jael-Ishmael, and this man's foe. But why did Westley Garland start appalled if Jael-Ishmael was unknown to him? Because he recognized the eyes confronting him. Those eyes once seen by mortal were unforgotten this side of the grave; they were the eyes that wrought the trouble of the Lindons, the eyes that vanquished the original of the portrait upon which Garland had just been gazing.

Without word or indication of significance, the gipsy (in whom the reader no doubt detects that versatile genius, Mr. Barnard), walked gravely from the conservatory, away by the wilderness of flowering shrubs and over the lawn, the high-tangled grass of which was swept by his ragged cloak until the heads bobbed one to another gracefully, after bending low at his passing.

As though fascinated, Westley Garland could not withdraw his gaze. Imagining him lost in one of those poetic reveries which so greatly impressed her, Rose did not attempt to break the spell; it was a ruder hand that performed this mission, a thick-set, brawny man of the most unpleasing type, of the farmer-miller species, who, striding upon the scene with no gentle footsteps, desired, roughly enough, to know their business.

"No business at all, friend, rather pleasure. Visitors at the adjoining town, we have taken an idle stroll hither, and

ventured to enter, knowing something by repute of the paintings. Perhaps you will tell me why you inquire so authoritatively?"

"At your pleasure. I am Reuben Smith, bailiff and overlooker to his lordship the master, now away in foreign parts, and yonder's my mill by the lock. You came in at the window?"

"At the window, Mr. Bailiff, for which accept my apology; but really the place seemed so deserted."

"And it's his lordship's pleasure it should remain so; I will therefore thank you to allow me to fasten up."

Mr. Garland acquiesced with his agreeable smile, and was about to step into the garden, when a sweet-faced lady, dressed with unassuming, yet withal elegant neatness, was seen approaching, accompanied by a boy with one of those lovely faces we come upon so seldom, to whom Nelly Rose immediately ran, shaking hands very warmly, and introducing as—

"Lorry Vincent," and, "Lorry's Ma!" The latter bowed with considerable grace, her pleasant tongue running on, her widowed eyes looking all sorts of amiable telegrams, her little hand playing with the tassel of her garden parasol; and all the time watching with that curious cat-about-to-spring effect inseparable from this charming person.

"From Brighton! Ah, I know you by name very well; I read one of your works from the library; forgive me, it was a grand theme, grandly interpreted. And you like Brighton? I don't; noisy, slightly vulgar, every month except November. The beach simply abominable, shingle and chalk. It seemed to me Brighton was remarkable for two features, churches and hotels. *You* were not at Brighton when I formed that opinion, or I should have included a third, genius! No; I love the quieter nooks upon the sea-board, such for instance as we may discover in Devon."

Observing him start as with sudden pain, she went off at a tangent to something else.

"You suffer from neuralgia, now I'm sure you do! I understand the nervous sensitiveness of such a nature. Perhaps caught cold once in that very county, and the name

revived painful recollections. Oh, it's a distracting complaint! Lorry dear, leave off pulling Miss Blake's curls! A pretty child, Mr. Garland, but I wouldn't exchange *my* boy for the loveliest girl in Europe, he's so tender and thoughtful. Do you think him like me? No! More does anybody else; they *cannot,* Mr. Garland, he is so utterly like his Papa! Bless the man, what is he following us about for?" This point blank to Reuben, who ducked very like a poacher overtaken in the covert; but came up square and fierce, however, facing the lady, his self-possessed antagonist.

"I'm waiting to lock up, mum! Not of course to hurry you and your friends!"

"Mr. Lorry will see that all is safe, sir," she answered haughtily. "Would you care to look over the old place, Mr. Garland?"

"No, I thank you; I must be getting back to my hotel. I have to give a Reading this week, and should regret causing disappointment through hoarseness; I am rather susceptible to cold."

"I knew it!" cried Mrs. Vincent triumphantly, "and damp!" A curious shudder shot through the Minister's frame; Mrs. Vincent must have been a little right after all.

"You will call and see us at the Cottage, any morning?" And as she gracefully tendered the invitation, carelessly poising the sunshade on the tips of her fingers, she seemed the embodiment of elegant hospitality.

"Thanks, my stay is a very short one; I may not visit Sleperton again."

"And do you return with Mr. Garland, my love?" to Rose, who replied, "I think Mamma goes back with Mr. Garland, ma'am; I shall go with her."

Lorry's large eyes lifted to the Minister's face with an appealing prettiness, as to implore that his playmate might be spared to him as long as possible.

"Don't you like Lorry's Mamma?" asked the little one, *ingénue,* on the way home. With characteristic honesty Mr. Garland answered, "No, Rose, I do not like Lorry's Mamma!" Although *why,* it might have puzzled him to tell.

Twilight time arrived, the weirdly impressive hour of the gloaming, and Garland and Rose wandered hand in hand upon the beach, far from those stragglers dotting the shore to the fore of the town. In Brighton he could not thus have roamed with the child at that solitary hour without provoking remark. This unfettered liberty was enjoyed to its fullest extent, and seemingly overcome by some powerful emotion, he pressed the little girl to his heart, imprinting a swift kiss upon her lips; then, recovering himself immediately, and gathering all within the compass of a buttoned coat, he said quietly, while Rose curled her hand back into his,—

"You are fortunate, Rose, to have a good father to love. He is fortunate to have such a dear little girl to love him."

"I love you too." Rose said this without affectation; she meant it.

"Thanks, Rose. You can offer me nothing that would give me greater pleasure; so I am thankful, Rose, very, very thankful."

"You shall have it all; no one else shall have a bit."

"Not even Lorry?"

"Oh, that's all nonsense; just the pleasure a girl takes in playing with a handsome boy; but I never think anything about that sort of thing; as Mamma says, 'I could trust Rose to keep a boarding-school in order;' that is the reward of being innocent!" And with a mischievously demure air, little Rose looked playfully up in his face; but he was gazing with thoughtful sadness out to sea, to the west, following the jagged coast-line; right away to where it was hollowed and indented into coves and bays; to where steep tors rose clad with dusky verdure, amidst which peeped forth the villas of family and domestic comfort; and where a stately Hall was desolate and silent as the grave.

* * * *

It is the night of the Dramatic Reading, and five minutes before the entrance of the reader. That eccentric but magnificent interior, the Pavilion Dome, was very early, indeed long before the opening of the doors, beset by eager crowds; at moderate computation half as many people as are here

assembled were unable to obtain admission. Within, the immense concert hall is transformed to a court drawing-room; it is a very garden of brilliant colour, and it seems that every lady who has a pretty mantle to sport, and a tasteful head-dress to wave its plumes amidst the lace, has passed through the arabesque portals this evening.

The buzz of conversation is at its height, and criticism is in full play.

"Society does not assemble in this *distingué* order every evening, my love, so make note of anything very pretty; but truly, although the toilettes are choice, I do not see a really good-looking woman!" Thus an æsthetic and exceedingly plain mamma, to the elder of five æsthetic and exceedingly plain daughters, to whom this elder Amazon acted as a sort of *aide-de-camp*. They sat all of a row, plover fashion, and gazed around with an air of pity and commiseration. They all went to Mr. Garland's church, where they sat plover, in one of the front pews. They are shocked at the vanity around, especially at the blooming of so much scarlet, their own dainty shoulders being encased in white Shetland. They cannot reconcile this frivolous following of a spiritual adviser with the principles of true religion; they would not be here to-night were it not for "The Mariners;" they have eschewed the world long decades since, and made a present of the old bones to Heaven—and to Westley Garland. They have a splendid situation; were among the first to trip with their guineas to Cramer's, and select it from the plan; and they have been stationed at such an out-post by the *aide-de-camp* that the great man's eyes *must* rest upon the impressive party.

A little removed from these, cynical Sir Pertinax, who has been unfortunate this summer over turf and baize, and who takes life to be a mistake, and fashion a bubble, is reviewing Society with thoughtful sarcasm. The stout, somewhat florid lady next him is of opinion that he is an unpleasant person. The lady has broad bands of gold upon her wrists, and sight of the tantalizing metal acts as irritatingly upon him as scarlet upon the inevitable bull, when one is taking a short cut across the meadows.

Two others sit apart who dote upon music; they come to-night, never having seen the lion; and being of an opposite religion, cannot attend upon Sunday, where he is to be heard and seen every seventh day. They are of opinion no Reading will ever approach an Organ Recital for soul-inspiring and sympathetic eloquence; and they sit looking at the fine organ, one of the chief glories of this chamber, and talk melodiously to their heart's content. It really seems they know so much about music, nobody else can know anything. A virgin, who has attuned her dulcet notes to many lyres, leans a little forward and drinks up all their fine phrases with the eagerness of some rapt Lesbian. They are both men, and one is married, for he says, "My wife plays the violin like a seraph!" Whereat the virgin—virgins being below seraphs,—collapses visibly; while he of the noble sex, to which belonged Amati, Stradivarius, Guarnerius, Guadagnini, Paer, Paganini, and other of the Cremona band, went on to remark that it was thought the seraph in question would develope into a Neruda. His companion, who was evidently not married, remarked, "If the Pavilion gardens were in my hands, I would have lanterns, as they do it in the East; just a few tasteful colours glowing like fruits of the Hesperides, a revival of the Baden twilight triumphs, when Strauss set the nations spinning by Tarantula weirdism of the Lilienkranze!" which remark established him an associate of Apollo and the sacred nine of Parnassus.

Observe the grand dame to the left, fanning herself, with languid elegance, which is one of the most difficult of the acquired arts. She is extremely accomplished, and loves talent in others—as do all truly accomplished people; exalts intellect, particularly when allied with eloquence; and, although saying little about it, considers Westley Garland somewhat overrated; but then she does not go with the crowd. The glint of her bracelet plays upon the pearl-grey silk, the pink-tipped plumes upon her *crêpe chapeau* flutter to the breath agitating this garden of plumes.

Yonder is a dark beauty of the Spanish school; notice the fall of deep lace, the dead gleam of gold, the embroidery of jet,

the simple yet sumptuous elegance; she enjoys this grouping of fair women, for she has the true artist eye of the south; she enjoys this palace which might have sprung from amongst love legends of Granada; she recalls glories of the Escurial, sweet moonlight walks in gardens, mountains stretching dim and shadowy away to old Segovia; when chanting of the monks from within the palace lent dreamy sanctity to the hour. She asks for our Pavilion chapel; thinking of that within their own palace near Madrid, with its fifty altars of crowded jewels, its eight organs of silver—all tuned together for praise—its tabernacle of gold and jewels, sixteen feet in height. She wonders when told our Prince Regent was not that way inclined; and that even this fine interior, in his day, served for stabling the first stud of Europe; and wonders still more when told that the chapel where the luxuriant Fitzherbert lies is one of remarkable humility; so she drops the subject with the graceful tact of southern natures, and enjoys our fruit and flowers; as she enjoyed them by fragrant ways in Leon, Gijon, Aragon, and Murcia, when a courtly gentleman brought her ceanothus, and murmured her name in the love-low accents of Valencia. She is here this evening, not because Society is here, but because this Protestant of the impassioned beauty and poet's eye recalls the courtly lover of the sunny port.

Remark that impulsive little body so superbly dressed. The novelists and dramatists as a rule dress their women well, but we seldom see a costume so becoming, and we attach nobility of the first water. She is alone, defiant in her richness, coldly indifferent, save to envious slant looks which cause her cheek to tingle. Royalty affronted! Not at all! She is a popular favourite of the Odéon, who here passes the recess, closes her bijou château awhile and reposes in privacy; composed, yet observant; she will not gather much from our barbarians—as she terms these showy folk—an inkling of eccentricity, a tint or two of coarseness to be utilized by her consummate talent; a glimpse of elegant vulgarity she will colour into a study all Paris will devour; a display of robing which may cause her to shudder slightly, but will bear trans-

position into a style that may set the fashion for many an evening to come.

Beside her sits a plain lady descended from many Earls; she is rising like Amphitrite from billows of semi-pellucid gros-grain of a rich onyx and *eau de Nil* blending, whereon *point d'Alençon* foams from bosom to skirt; the actress is pleased to look down the surf and the waves, and to pronounce the costume—*exécrable!* The lady is unconscious if male or female be beside her.

A duchess and party attract notice, simply for their severe neatness; precise and quiet, bound without gilt edging, in neutral tints. They might be taken for a comfortable family out of the wilds; but be not deceived by appearances; these people could lay this Alhambra with solid plates of gold, and never feel the loss. Observe them to-morrow—not on the King's Road or any vain drive or promenade, but in the unfrequented paths beyond the township, where quiet villages nestle midst clefts of the downland, and where the whirl of wheels is rare. It is a mulberry chariot, quite of the old school, and, like the family vault, massive to annihilation; of course, sight of the family is impossible, when embedded down amongst the leather and velvet cushions; but sometimes they sit bolt upright, wonderfully erect for their ages, especially when a man is seen beating a donkey, or a dog running with its tongue out. At such times they look as stern as those placid faces can look, occasionally stop the coachman and inquire into it; but they are careful not to give anything away, being of opinion that it encourages idleness, and devoting their surplus donations to drinking fountains, cat's hospitals, and similar philanthropic institutions.

The family in mourning are the cream *par excellence* of Norman descent; they adhere to Brighton or Hastings for ancient family associations, dating from William of Conquering fame. They are in costly sable, and intend wearing it beyond the complimentary term, in consequence of its being so becoming. They do not mourn after the received school, experiencing magnificent consciousness of the honour conferred upon Heaven by "our representative."

The dark man with the curly hair is considered very fascinating; *attaché*, poet, traveller, aristocratic Bohemian; he has lived everywhere, chiefly in the East; says this Pavilion is a pill-box to the Cotsea Bhang on the Jumna, with its wilderness of aromatic flowers, and its fountains in the midst of groves of mango, lime, orange, guava, tamarind, and pomegranate: talks much of Ramisseram, and has drawings of Constantia, the quaint Pavilion of Hindostan, with its stucco fret-work and Chinese barbarism, and retinue of scarlet lions; its hideous crowding of Gothic towers and Grecian pilastres, Mussulman brazen pyramids, Arab pinnacles, Chinese pagodas, Hindoo columns, and all the pageant of the eccentric in architecture. He rattles on with his palace talk, comparing our Regent to Shah Jehan, who built him a dream in Delhi, but who outshone our Prince by reason of his greater magnificence, his gardens costing one million sterling. Therein flourished Asia's choicest flowers; the marble walls were laid with plates of silver; galleries of lattice-work blazed with emeralds and rubies, so disposed as to present the appearance of clusters of grapes in different stages of growth. He wears a superb specimen of the *Gloire de Dijon*, and he will tell you he brought the tree from those gardens; of course nobody believes it, but they take his roses all the same, for the rose from any other garden smells as sweet.

"I don't see a really stylish figure, do you, dear? If not quite as advanced as the New York blondes whom Mora and Sarony photograph so charmingly, we do see style in Brighton. But there, my love—look at that girl, a Duke's daughter we used to visit, but I really couldn't tolerate that absence of style any longer! Heigho! If she does not alter that figure, wherever she will be put when she gets to Heaven is more than I can say!" Thus chatters old Lady Angular, whose absence of symmetry amounts to severity, and whose taste is considered mildly Moorish.

"One scarcely likes to sit here in the full blaze of that chandelier; I remember the time when gallantry held girls sacred, and the eyes of the other sex drooped before youth and innocence!" Thus the Hon. Deborah, a venerable spinster, to

a bosom friend, another venerable spinster, and both of this parish: both also of Society.

There is a long man with a thin face, the longest man with the thinnest face in the room; he crosses over to the man from India; they are club-mates, have each written, each sketched; and kneeling upon the fauteuil, the thin-faced man tries to out-talk the other upon Society in Bengal, Madras, Bombay, Burmah, and that overrun tomb-and-temple-tract stretching from the Ganges to the heart of Punjaub. The thin man invites the other to his bungalow, as he calls his pretty box set between hills, where in the hall a tiger of his shooting glares upon you, with high grass peering up behind the furniture from pots set upon the Indian matting. His rooms are plentiful with gorgeous screens of plumage his unerring shot robbed from tropic forests. He has left behind,—at the seats from which he comes to talk awhile with his friend—a dark-skinned, pensive girl, an orphan, the only child of a scholarly European, long settled in the East. She is very sensitive, not at all at home by this machine-bordered Ægean; disliking the cliff with its long train of coolly criticizing school-girls, who make fun of her brunette beauty and rich colouring of dress; and sighing for the Piazza descending to the Hooghly, where the little children of Gardenrich sing in the low light of evening, amongst the white and purple cactus bloom. The walks and drives about Brighton are so different to the wealth of verdure amidst which her girlhood sported; the poppies growing in the cornfields recall the vast sweeps of scarlet plantation that belted the hills, where they sketched beneath the banyan groves; the blue bloom of this sea brings back rich waving fields of indigo beside which she wandered, searching for lilies on the Ganges bank; and this Pavilion, with its minarets and domes, causes old Benares to rise before her, the Mecca and the Rome of Hindooland. Suddenly there is a hush in the conversation. It betokens an arrival of more than ordinary interest, not Royalty—Royalty does not go to Brighton,—yet evidently a grandee, compared with whom these pale their lustre. Ebenezer Wriggle insinuates himself amongst the rows of seats; Josiah Bubb comes bustling up; and

Mr. Lurch marches pompously as though about to take the chair. As a matter of accuracy somebody has to be turned out of the chair, for an audacious young man, either fraudulently or unintentionally, has placed himself in the seat of error; and all the Tonic Ale and Pickles, Sauce and Buckram, rise indignantly as the three great municipal officers advance to clear the way; and round the circle, in the wake of these, a maid of agile movement follows, bearing upon her arm a shawl gorgeous with gold and colour. Immediately behind the damsel comes a gentleman with a white cravat, bearing a cushion of considerable size, which he adjusts with much care in one of the chairs. Then appears a gentleman in plain evening dress, preceding and ushering to her seat perhaps the most queenly woman who has ever been thus attended. Of course Society is too well bred to stare, but it does the next best thing, looks on the slant. And a very erect and haughty appearance is presented, of a graceful and beautiful woman, but beneath whose beauty is an expression of sadness that must touch any heart, were it not for the cold and repelling hauteur. Society is too taken up with observation of the lady to notice her companion with more than the most cursory of glances. It is an elderly gentleman, of shrivelled appearance, sallow, with thin, light locks, and a little fringing of whisker seemingly hesitative which colour to take to, drab or white. Most of those assembled know her to be Lady Helen Darrel, and the gentleman, vaguely alluded to as "His Lordship," is popularly supposed to be her ladyship's father. These seated, that excitement is quelled, and people settle down to watch the platform for the Reader's appearance. The thin-faced, long-bodied man from India says *Au revoir* to the curly-headed man from the same quarter, both of course looking with vivid interest at the last named group, one of them feeling sure he has seen the old man somewhere in the jungle, while the other distinctly remembers dancing with "that superb creature" in Calcutta.

A gentleman walks up to the platform, ascends the short steps, and stands before the people, and the outer circle applauds vociferously, but ceases abruptly when it is dis-

covered to be merely the individual with the water-bottle. Having placed this to his liking, and raised the reading-stand to the height he deems appropriate, he retires. A pause.

Then the Rev. Westley Garland walks upon the platform, and with a gentle inclination of the head, in response to the cordial welcome which echoes round the Dome with spontaneous heartiness, he takes his place at the reading-desk, opening a black-covered manuscript-book with intentional slowness, to allow the noise to abate.

Some notice that his regard for applause is very slight, so slight they fancy he does not hear it, or is lost in thought. Others remark his attitude to be systematic and regular, and pronounce Garland a very business-like fellow indeed, very! Not a few fall into quiet side studies of the face, chisel the aristocratic profile upon memory, cut a portrait-cameo of a kingly type, and from the picture derive many after-musings. Those who are partial to tracing the poetry to be found in a few rare faces, revel over the soul stamped upon these aquiline features. Some few fancy they have met him somewhere, before this Brighton era, in quiet select circles far beyond the pale of Society: they fancy so, but can't remember where. One or two are almost sure he was at the University when they were there, they are not quite certain, but seem to recollect the face, although so aged and altered; and they go humming and drumming "Garland!" "Garland!" and get nothing out of the name, and so give it up, particularly when he begins to read. Everything in the hall is given up then, there is no resisting the spell of that wonderful voice, and the most idle chatterer there desists, to listen.

Richly modulated; yet the secret of success was more the result of feeling than of art, all musical, sonorous, sweet, or sympathetic; the voice thrilled or moved, and at times compelled the heart to follow it; it was no ear-melody, this, but language sinking deep into the soul,—all the cunning of master eloquence never imparted graver charm (on no occasion was he ever known to interpret comedy); tuneful, harmonious, and, above all, unutterably tender: showing that there may

be words more exquisite than songs, and music more lovely than the throb of harps.

People had speculated and wondered upon the probable subject of Mr. Garland's selection. Would he read something appropriate to the Mariners, would he please with some descriptive picturesque poetry of the wild sea-girt life, or move them to tears over some idyl of homes left husbandless and fatherless, while brave men confronted furious legions of billows; or would it be some gentle love-note, some sweet rhapsody of cerulean days, or perchance a poem of the country, dog-roses and bloom of the May, honey-suckle and odorous limes?

No, it is a simple chronicle, so simple it seems strange these ultra-fastidious people can be found to sit so patiently; nay, they are breathless, absorbed, spell-bound. Merely the story of a sailor, bluff, and honest, and good-looking, who loves a lass and longs for her, but is too poor to wed, and waiteth issue of the fisheries, she all the time beloved by another who would do this one an injury; at last their little savings are inducement to unite, and both are happy, and the sun beats broad upon their sea. But that other, by circuitous ways, brings trouble, and their store exhausted by treacherous waves that rend the net and crash the bark, they are brought to sorry straits and get in debt, and from bad to worse, when the crisis comes, and the fisher disappears—drowned, say the wise, which the foolish accept—and the home stands empty with poorer hearts, a mother and child, and a wolf prowling round the walls.

Like a clarion note the reader's voice rang with the divine injunction: "Help the poor, wherever met, whenever found, help the poor! Go forth to succour those bereft of their protector, those beset with peril, encircled by enemies; help the defenceless! There are mothers and children abroad, shelterless under the wide sky, no glimpse of hope anywhere, save in each other's love. Rescue them, restore those homes, replace those friends; there are the helpless hungering for a word of kindness, drooping for need of care—search for them, seek near, seek far, they are pining for your help!" And people

thought he had done well for the Mariners, this impassioned speaker, so unceremoniously breaking the thread of his theme to advocate this strong sympathy with the oppressed. Then he resumed his plaintive story, and his audience followed its innocent dramatism, point to point of the quiet yet intense piece of weaving, and the power of the chronicle lived in those fixed looks, composed attitudes, straining forward, hand up to the ear of the aged, silent attention of the young. The spectacle of that audience was no uninteresting study, the mass of people hanging upon one man's utterance, that intellectual and refined speaker exerting his every energy to awaken kindly feeling and sympathy in the mixed assembly present.

Once or twice he lifted his eyes; to rest once—when dwelling with infinite pathos upon the child of the story—upon his little friend Rose. At another time, upon the upturned face, like a mask of marble, of Lady Helen; he caught the eyes, became entangled therewith, and put them from him as things that burned.

The Reading was divided into three sections, the second division being poetic; each division was complete in itself, each extending to between half and three-quarters of an hour. He was not niggardly with his genius when dispensing for a charitable purpose. It was a memorable evening, remembered by more than the Mariners whom he had befriended.

CHAPTER XIV.

SKIRMISHING.

"Meteors about, I think!" and Mr. Barnard pointed to the sky, a flash of light suddenly attracting attention. "If you will permit me, I'll take a turn upon the lawn? This phenomenon, like the Aurora Borealis, is very interesting."

"By all means," said St. Aubyn, looking anxiously in the direction of the weather-glass; "I fear we shall have a storm to-night."

He passed out, bareheaded, and, as though conscious of the direction, walked swiftly to that spot where the shrubs edged the cliff. He heard a footstep to the right, and crouching like a beast of prey, Mrs. Brandon passed him close, muffled and stealthy; there was strong scent of turpentine, spirits of wine, oil, and other inflammable substances upon her trail, and the man in ambush smiled grimly, and, when she had passed, leaned and looked down. There, far below, a torch, of impromptu make, still guttered and flickered fitfully upon the cliff where it had fallen, sufficient however to reveal the clinging figure of a man, who, completely overhanging the water, gesticulated and signalled for assistance. A yacht was lying off almost within speaking distance, the moonlight broad on its white sails and deck, where a man outstretched at ease was smoking and looking at the stars; from this it was evident the man in extremity had not been seen, nor the torch which Mrs. Brandon had hurled from the height as a beacon. Save for this flickering light, all the steep was clothed in darkness, while the yawning cavern at foot, where never man had entered but by boat, was hidden under the surf. Calmly,

as preparing for his couch, Noel Barnard removed his faultless broad cloth and stood as faultless in his undress. The torch had lodged midway between the man and the summit, it was not half consumed; did that lonely star-gazer but turn his head an inch in the direction of the cliff the man must be seen, would be rescued; it was Noel Barnard's purpose to prevent this. It was perilous to a suicidal degree; but that weighed last with the daring schemer. He sat upon the brink, and, lowering one of those lithe sinewy hands, tested the undergrowth; it stood a vigorous pull. Then he tried the surface with his heels for a ledge or prominence; the face was uneven, rough, and jagged; he turned round and commenced the difficult process of descent, holding hard to the growth or buttress where the rock clove the outline, planting his feet where practicable to save weight; so, lower, lower, beat of the waves sounding more shrill every yard he descended, the strong wind breasting the height as though it would dislodge him like thistle-down, and causing the flambeau to flare with a redder, wider light. Near this the lowermost man (who could toil no lower, but must drop, failing his hold, into the seething caldron), was swinging like some ghastly pendant to a gibbet; and away in the distance was the yacht, light as some fairy bark, its owner dreamily wreathing the stars in clouds. Nearer the torch, it seemed but a hand's breadth; and already the height above seemed a journey to be done by flight alone; now by accident dislodging pieces of the stone or earth, which fall and alarm the victim, who, looking up, sees the dread form of his enemy gaining upon him and banishing his only hope of rescue, and, drawing breath, he shouts again, and this time with wild despair; but before the echo of that harrowing cry can have travelled to hearing of those on board of the vessel, the torch has been seized and is quenched. And then commences the more arduous part of Noel Barnard's mission; he does not intend to return yet, for his work is but half accomplished. He has to descend yet farther; he has determined to complete both deed and doom; and the man below, although he cannot see that form, stealing unerring as a deadly redskin on the

trail, yet feels it is approaching, and nerves himself for the death-tussle when one or other, or perchance both, must go down to the depths. But it is a long time approaching, or it seems so, in that time of terrible suspense; only the falling messengers give awful warning. At last the pursuer has turned round, and like an immense lizard advances head first; and in the darkness the white reptile hand glides down and loosens the other's grasp, and uproots the last hold to which in his agony he now clings with both hands. There is a crash, the growth gives way, man, plant, earth, stone, falling like lead; the lizard pausing to rest upon his ledge, and turning with sardonic relish the whole morsel under his tongue. Shortly, he upon deck coming down from his dreams, stretching his legs, awakens his skipper, and, pacing the deck, takes his promised view of her home by moonlight; hoping, yet scarcely daring to hope, for a glimpse of the lovely form at one of the chamber windows, and sees something that causes him to snatch up the glass and again inspect the frontage with the closest attention at command! There, at an upper window, standing between the darkness and the brilliancy of the apartment, is a figure which he imagines to be hers. As it moves he remarks the same dress he had seen in the evening, and a lace scarf thrown over the head falls above the shoulders; she notices the movement with the glass, and kisses her hand to him thrice, then holds her arms forth appealingly, as though imploring release, lifting them heavenwards, and in the direction of himself, and clasping them despairingly upon her bosom. A touching and effective tableau, and well done; at least such was the verdict of Mr. Barnard, who, walking across the lawn, cool as though he had but just left the supper-room, re-entered, brushing knees and elbows with the finest of lawn handkerchiefs, and looking with mild reproach at Williams:—

"Why not have warned me, friend, I should catch my toes. So you play croquet?" playfully to Lena; "And a charming exercise; very pretty, very! Did you ever play the game by moonlight?"

Soon afterwards Mrs. Brandon enters quietly and resumes the jelly with frank composure.

"Head better, I trust, ma'am?" Mrs. Brandon bows gracefully to the visitor. The head is a little better, and she thanks him for his kind sympathy.

"But the meteor!" says St. Aubyn mischievously; "Let us see this fallen star, Mr. Barnard."

That gentleman removes from a coat-tail pocket with the gravity of a Geological lecturer in Jermyn Street, a flint nearly as large as a plough-share, and sedately quotes,—

"I have no doubt, my dear sir, but that this is the subject of our speculation; it is well known that flint forms a very rare constituent of the fire-ball proper, which mainly consists of iron, nickel, and other minerals, but I take this to be an exceptional case; just handle this, Mrs. Brandon, you will do me the favour of agreeing it is altogether exceptional! I look upon this as a most remarkable aërolite; this night will be long remembered; when I discovered it, the thing was hot, and I burned my fingers, a common fate in the pursuit of science!"

"I really know so little of the sciences of geology or mineralogy; botany is more in our way, is it not, my dear Miss Lena?" and with a very charming smile the lady returned the specimen with many thanks.

Meanwhile, out at sea, the young yachtsman was puzzling his handsome, idle head, over the curious action of the young lady in whom he experienced so warm an interest. After twisting it about, he construed a sign out of it: this lovely and unfortunate girl was unhappy, miserably imprisoned by a stern, unnatural sire, whose brain was half turned by foreign suns and book-reading. She had seen him pass at sunset time; had expected his return; had joyfully beheld the yacht again where it crossed the moon-line; had appealed to him with a sublime hope. Oh, yes! He saw it all; *he* was appointed the knightly champion for her deliverance; he accepted his destiny; he breathed a prayer.

"Brown, the whisky!"

The skipper, refreshed by his nap, produced the keg with alacrity, remarking upon the chilly moisture of the air, that went straight to the bones subject to rheumatism. This

little matter Mr. Arden dismissed with his accustomed liberality, he was generosity from crown to sole. Buttoning the rough pilot-coat upon his chest, he walked the deck with briskness, muttering to himself about a select company of historic personages who had succoured damsels of high degree, stowed away in dragon-guarded castles with a hydra-headed ogre as chief of the firm! Whereon skipper Brown, finding himself not wanted, or not admitted to this new fancy of his young master's, peered through the glass into the shady groves, and presently espied something clambering or trying to clamber up the wave-broken rock at the entrance of the cave, that, black and forbidding, formed a hideous arch consecrated to night.

"Yer pardon, Mr. William, what be that a steering yonder?"

Arden took the glass, drew himself leisurely forth from his reverie and looked. There was so much moonlight it became difficult at first to distinguish. A clear bright night, clear as when the frost bites and all the land is bound; while the sea drinks up the snow-flakes, or casts them indifferently from her, fringed with her foam. A veil of silver seemed spread dim and ghost-like, stretching leagues, torn in places where the wind had caught it, splashed and sprinkled, and bestrewn with a spray of diamonds.

"List, Mr. William, 'tis a shout!"

"It's a man! How the deuce did he come there? Overtaken by the tide, probably."

"You give orders for picking him up, I suppose, sir?" and the skipper paused anxiously.

CHAPTER XV.

RECOUNTS THE ADVENTURES OF 'WALTER GORDON.'

With slow and toiling footsteps Walter Gordon entered the pretty village, long after dusk had robbed the trees of colour and shrouded the old church tower in grey perspective.

Little children, peeping forth before going off to bed, saw the dragging progress along the village street, and murmuring, "A tramp!" went away to dream of its white face. A waggoner stood in the doorway of the ale-house, and just looked up from his pipe; lights were behind the red curtain, and the window shone cheerfully forth from the pale background. The forge was closed; the smith, lying upon the grass-plot of his garden, played with his boy; bits of iron and an array of horse-shoes stuck in the grass, emulating pastime the child had seen through the Rectory palings.

The village school-house looms like some Gothic toy; a light at the upper window betokens the retiring to rest of the estimable mistress. Beyond this the Rectory stands back in its shadowy grounds.

There are diverging lines of cottages; several better-class dwellings, with five windows and a door, and a formal plot of pelargoniums and geraniums, with box or gentiana borders. One more ambitious has a wooden sailor and a miniature cannon, which the youngsters regard with becoming awe.

There is a scattering of still superior dwellings, of the 'contract' villa species. These are tenanted by Seaborough traders, and afford an agreeable change, with salubrious

addition. And there are outlying farms, rural and hospitable, with snowy sheets bleached on the hedge-rows, and wide old chimney-pieces, below which one may sit to count the stars.

And there is a large old place standing back from the village Green. It is surrounded by trees; and has a great garden track to the front and to the rear, where all seems going to weed and seed. This is Sleperton Manor, and Walter leans wearily against its quaint approach.

The old house of which the aged countryman had told him! And the child,—for he seems little more,—gazes upon the massive frontage with that languid interest a weary wanderer takes in the association-haunted piles of forgotten ways.

Beyond this is a charming cottage, low-pitched, pine-built, fragrant through summer and winter seasons: picturesque ever, and from all sides an artist's study. This is The Cottage, Mrs. Vincent's retreat,—a bijou mixture of art and luxury.

Lorry Vincent stands by the gate while Walter passes, and their eyes meet.

"Are you looking for some house? Can I help you?"

And the boy with the lovely face leans forward over the gate, with the kindest and most winning smile imaginable.

"Thank you. Can you tell me of any house where I can obtain shelter for the night?"

"I do not know of any apartments to let. Just now while the season lasts, is the busy time at Seaborough. In winter there are plenty almost at your own price. I daresay you have walked from the town, and are tired?"

"I am very tired. I have not been well of late."

"I do feel for you. It is so bad to be a stranger in a place, and unwell!"

Walter thrilled to the sympathy, his eyes drooped before the handsome orbs bent so admiringly, yet all pityingly, upon the face he felt to be very worn and pale.

"Your words are like music; it is long since I heard kind voices."

"Poor fellow! What shall I do to assist you? Where

can you go? But come in and sit down to rest. I am sure Mamma will not mind. She is listening to the band now."

Saying which, the boy unlatches the gate and holds it open for the stranger. Walter gratefully accepts the proffered rest, and, together, they enter the cottage.

A fair-faced, rather delicate youth, this Walter,—with a profusion of blonde curls short to the head, a slight symmetrical figure; a small, white hand, which of itself would bespeak his gentle breeding; a timid, shrinking manner, indicative of extreme sensitiveness; and a tone of voice which, while sweet, was sad.

The gentleness which won upon the old man earlier in the evening now woos Lorry Vincent to a friendship strong and true.

With infinite tenderness he removes the cap from those clustering curls, and brings an ewer and towel. A boy is so thoughtful, so ready, so considerate! Say,—Oh! ye mothers with one such,—is this not so? Are not theirs the lissom fingers to perform those acts of loving service so dear to you, and of which you think long after in the still, small hours? Are not theirs the quieter footsteps when your head throbs painfully, and all the world seems jarring on your nerves? And theirs the lowered voices until the very air seems quivering with their sympathy?

They are not all alike, but some are exquisite, and of this order was Lorry Vincent.

The gratitude welling up in the clear, eloquent eyes of the other may move him, for he hurries to bring wine and biscuits for this tired wayfarer so little older than himself. Then he sits down and looks with troubled interest at the trembling one. It is so long since kindness has touched this heart, while all who have encountered it have pierced, bruised, and wounded it, after the manner of the world!

Their acquaintance improves very rapidly. Lorry is pleased. With the exception of Harry Abbott's son, a charming boy picked out for his particular friend, he knows of none to whom he would give the full treasure of the first-fruits of his loving friendship. He has never met with any one like this,

—so quiet and gentle. He cannot tell why, but the voice thrills him; and those eyes, timorous as the eyes of some startled fawn, drooping before the strong hazel of his own, cause his cheeks to tingle with the first pleasurable sensation of his life.

"Tell me, who are you?" he murmured softly.

"One without a friend!" answered the other, while the eyes filled with tears and coursed down the delicate skin.

"But *who* are you? Tell me!"

"I am known as 'Walter Gordon;' but I believe even my name, like all else about me, is uncertain and doubtful. I am a nobody; yet my whole soul, my every hope, points to high and lofty aims. I have been unfortunate. The guardian who had care of my infancy and youth betrayed every trust reposed in her, placing me out cheap with common work-people, and devoting the money allotted her for my maintenance to other uses. The humble home which thus became my portion was in time broken up, and I was cast a helpless waif upon the world."

"How sad! I have read of such cases in books. And you have really gone through all this?" looking with renewed interest at the refined young face.

"All, and more. For listen,—the remainder is soon told. I was taken in hand by a hard, stern woman, who placed me at a small school; I suppose to be out of her way while at work, her ostensible business being the making of artificial flowers. But she was connected in some way (as dresser, I believe), with one of the London Theatres. In time,—I was then ten years of age,—I was compelled to join others at the Theatre, where I suppose my face, happening unfortunately to be passable in my looks, made me worthy of a conspicuous position, and I was always placed foremost in the groupings. This bore fruit, for another manager bid money for my services to play a page in his burlesques."

"Yes," said Lorry Vincent thoughtfully, "you are very good-looking."

And standing over Walter, he patted the curly fleece with affectionate solicitude.

"This resulted, when I was thirteen, in my being apprenticed for five years to a large travelling Circus company. The new life was a hard one. Some of the men were kind to me, others unfeeling and cruel; and one was very brutal, and used to beat me."

Master Vincent shrugged his shoulders, and took the hand of his friend.

"Sometimes gentlemen used to come behind the curtain, and not always for the best of purposes. One of these befriended me, interposing between that cruel man and myself. He spoke so kindly to me, I loved him from then. I met him after the performance, when it was dark and nobody saw us, and he gave me a sovereign to get myself little things he knew I needed. He said, 'If ever you are in trouble, and want a friend, come to me,' and gave me his card. I have never forgotten him, although I doubt not he has long since forgotten me; and I have come to try and find him here, and see if he will be again my friend. The work of the Circus was too much for my strength. Willing enough, I could not do more than nature permitted; no allowance was made, and I was beaten with severity. I could bear no more, and left them; but fatigue and privation following upon my other hardships, brought on illness from which I am, but now, recovering. And I owe much to the Christian woman who took me in, ministered to me, nursed me, nourished me, and gave me the means of reaching London."

"There are not many of that sort about, I imagine!"

"This was one of the Society of Friends, which may account for her broad charity and goodness. I went to London, to the gentleman's house, and to my disappointment learnt he was down here for a month. I had not sufficient money to bring me here; besides, how did I know my errand would prove successful? But I had *faith*, without which we should pass wretched lives indeed; and I hoped on, that strong staff to lean upon! I don't think him a good man, but—he was kind to me; and those who, like him and that dear lady, and yourself, have been kind to me, I can never forget."

Master Vincent blushed and his eyes drooped,—compliment

was new to him. True, Nelly Rose, his sometime sweetheart, had whispered "Do you know I think you are so beautiful!" To which he had replied, "For that no credit is due to me, my dear. I have a beautiful mamma!" And it had gone in at one ear and out at the other; but this, said so sincerely and with such evident gratitude, touched the boy, and he looked down and made no reply.

"There was nothing I could do but partly enlist the housekeeper's good will. I told her sufficient to lead her to advance me a few shillings; and now that I am here, my object is to obtain some kind of shelter for the time being,—until he will take me into his service, or procure me some situation."

"Nay, do not trouble about turning out to-night; we have vacant rooms; and if that's all, you shall sleep with me."

The blush that dyed the other's cheek lent tenfold charm to the delicate prettiness.

"Before we go on any further, let me explain something. It is a secret, but you will keep it for me; it is for my safety's sake? I am so fearful of being taken again by those Circus people, who, I suppose, can claim my services for the time I was apprenticed."

"I don't know much about it, but I suppose they can. Tell me your secret. I will keep it."

"Thanks, sir; I am sure I may rely upon your promise. *I am a girl.* I took this dress which, so often playing page, well fitted me, the better to escape discovery and insult; I left in its place my few poor savings; I would retain the dress, if possible, for I feel safe in it."

Master Vincent had edged a little away during the *naïve* revelation, feeling anything but safe himself.

"Well, you do make a good boy," he said, looking over the piece of art blushing there before him; "and I think will escape detection for some long time to come; but how bold of you!"

"The suffering I went through made anything better than returning to that life; I am afraid the boldness, as you call it, partakes more of that desperate struggle for preservation we are to believe is the first law.

"How you talk! You might have been to college."

"My college has been a hard one, in which there were more blows than books, and more kicks than halfpence!"

"How old are you?"

"Not fifteen yet, and *so* tired of it all." And with a sad smile that, with the mournful voice was inexpressibly pathetic the unfortunate child leaned her head back upon Lorry's shoulder and burst into tears.

"Come, come, do not cry, I will be your friend, your brother; you want a nice big brother like me to fight your battles; and I *can* fight for a cause, you should see me tackle Reuben Smith about the Manor."

"Can you tell me how to act?"

"Well, I wouldn't depend too much upon this gentleman; look to your own efforts more: by the way, what is his name?"

"Sir Charles Neville!" Master Vincent started. "Do you know him?"

"Mamma does; he is always flirting with somebody or other; for goodness' sake keep out of his way; I am quite sure he will never be any good to you! I can't bear the man."

"Do you know of any situation I could take?"

"Well, after what you have told me it is a curious thing to recommend. There is the large school near to the sea, a young gentlemen's school; they are in want of a page-boy there, I heard our servant say so; but then you know it's a hazardous sort of place for you."

"I don't mind that, if I can only get it; is there any other?"

"Major Howard wants a 'tiger;' but then Sir Charles visits there!"

"Is there no other?"

"Mr. Simcox, the curator of Seaborough Museum, wants a boy to give out books from the Free Library; what sort of boy are you at running up a ladder?"

Lorry was himself again, merrily, wickedly mischievous. His companion, smiling faintly, answered,—

"Not very quick, I'm afraid."

"Well then, there's my friend Harry's Papa; I dare say he would take you to learn the farming. He is so good, he is; I am quite sure, could he hear the circumstances of your case, he would dispense with the premium; but what would be the good of it all? You couldn't do that work, it would be too heavy for you; and I don't know that my friend, Harry Abbott, would not find it out in time; and I don't think *I* should like you always being with Harry, because I do take just a little interest in you, you know!"

This was a very pretty scene, could any one have peeped in thereon, and a fruitful essay might have been read of this young acquaintance.

Lorry walked to the window. The shades had deepened, the evening star shone like some gleaming gem; over the yellow-blossomed pastures the note of a nightingale quavered with silver clearness; up from the sea stole its fragrant night-bloom, blending with the incense of a hundred gardens; some mother in the village was lulling her little one to rest with a low vesper of the nursery; from the old church just by rolled the faint echo of a hymn the organist was practising for his next Sabbath's praise; a soft pastoral hush pervaded the scene, and it was very sweet to this child of many wanderings.

"How late Mamma is! I wish she would come in!" and the boy returned to his new friend's side.

"It is very happy to have a dear mother, to look for her coming, and to hang upon those moments when in her company. I have had no mother's love to brighten my dreary life."

"Have you no recollection of either of your parents?"

"Oh yes; of both! Dim as a dream, comes back a certain dreadful night when I was taken up hurriedly from my cot, carried in my mother's arms to a carriage, and driven off with great speed. I remember it so distinctly because my mother had always awed me by her studied grace of movement and deliberate action. To me she had ever been too full of majesty for love to dare to venture near, therefore that precipitate flight created an impression all these after-years have not served to erase!"

"How strange! I shouldn't wonder if you belong to some noble family; it often happens thus, at least in the novels and story-books I get from the library."

'Walter Gordon' smiled with grave sorrow, and, looking out far into the gloaming, said,—

"I am afraid there was as little nobility as loyalty about it. I would give anything to know the story of my birth. Often do I recall my father's face, so poet-like and handsome was it. I never read of King Solomon but my father comes to mind. I believe he was wise; I know he was wealthy, for our home with its great chambers was like the country dwelling of a monarch, so sumptuous, so stately, so ancient. I can recall the carved mantelpieces I used to stand upon a stool and try to reach; and the stained window on the landing of the oak stairs, through which I watched that star, first one colour and then another; and the dusky library with bronze busts of the philosophers; and the conservatory opening from the dining-room, over the chimney-piece of which apartment I can just see through the haze of years a splendid portrait of my mother."

Gradually, step by step during this revival of her childish memories, Lorry's face had been slowly turning ghastly. With open mouth and staring eyes he followed the narration, rising inch by inch from the couch, and he now laid a hand upon 'Walter Gordon's' arm with an excited and appealing gesture.

"That will do; don't say any more, you must be going; Mamma must not find you here, and she will be home almost directly!"

The other looked astonished at this sudden change, and arose tremblingly, wondering what new trouble was in store.

"It is not safe for you to remain—and hark!—That is the garden latch; come this way, quick!" He led the frightened child out by the back offices, and then, pointing over in the direction of the deserted Manor, entreated her to run there, pressing a small key into the hand he shook with loving heartiness.

"I will come to you some time to-night; do not fear,

nothing will harm you. You will find matches and a lantern upon the inlaid table as you enter at the small door on the west side. Good-bye, my dear; let me give you one kiss, there. God bless you!"

"Lorry! Lorry dear!" rang a sweet voice, while Mrs. Vincent entered at the front door; "Where are you, my child? I thought you would have come to meet me, but never mind, I've a gallant cavalier. Come in, Sir Charles, now do!"

"Aw, very good of you, I'm sure; but I promised faithfully to get back to the hotel; still I don't mind a minute or two. Where's the boy? Ah! how do, sir? Haven't seen you on the parade this evening!"

"I have been better engaged, Sir Charles!"

"Bless my soul, that's good too! Better engaged than listening to the town subscription band, and watching Society in this charming resort? Now I do like that, it's devilish good, young sir, and you've scored one!" And the baronet indulged himself in a little affected laugh, as he always did when anything tickled him.

"Do you know, Anna, that boy will grow up conceited, if you don't check him; it's a-aw, a horrid vice is conceit!" drawling which morality the young aristocrat stroked his fawn moustache with infinite daintiness. Sir Charles presumed upon long and intimate acquaintance with the fascinating widow, and always addressed her by her Christian name when alone. There were not wanting those who prophesied that this lady, whom they affectionately designated "the elegant schemer," would eventually develope by natural transition into the future Lady Neville. But, then, it was well known the baronet was a dreadful flirt, and nobody's chance was certain; and this caused great concern amongst those who took a solicitous interest in Mrs. Vincent and her affairs.

Master Vincent had left the room; he did not enjoy the society of this brainless fop, and he was angry and jealous of his friendship with his idolized mother, whom, with all her graces and cleverness, Lorry sometimes thought very foolish; and, he was fain to admit to himself with sorrow, a little

designing. And Anna Vincent could be more than this:—hence his hurried concealment of 'Walter Gordon.'

Fear winged the footsteps of that unfortunate, and, within a few minutes of thus abruptly quitting the hospitable shelter of an hour, she stood within the spacious hall of the silent mansion.

The place seemed so vast and so gloomy! Even after procuring the light, she half wished herself forth again upon the wide roads, or taking refuge in the portals of some quiet village homestead where the family had retired to rest.

She could not sit in these high oak chairs, and midst the congress of shades trooping forth, as it seemed, to stare at her; and, taking up the lantern, she approached one of the many doors that led to other rooms, and opening it entered. It was a well-furnished apartment, once appropriated as a study; the blinds were drawn, a lamp upon the table seemed to have been recently used, books and current newspapers betokened that some one was in the habit of still reading in this room, and 'Walter' did not doubt but that it was her new friend, or his mother. She felt more cheered by the discovery, and extended her research by proceeding to the chamber adjoining; this, from the costly, although dingy nature of the appointments, was manifestly the drawing-room. All the fittings of these old rooms were upon a splendid scale, and but made the desolation more complete. Somehow, while she looked upon them, a sense of bewildering consciousness of having seen the like before stole upon her, and she passed her hands before her eyes, trying to unravel the entanglement of dreams—it must have been in dreams she had seen them, for she had not entered any house save the most ordinary.

Then it chanced that she opened the door of the dining-room, where the moonlight fell through a panel of rose-coloured glass full upon the face of Lady Helen's portrait, above the mantel. She stood as one transfixed; all the misty pictures taking form and semblance, and when the uncertainty of her wonderment had cleared away, the proud yet beautiful woman came back with all the reality of a creature in the flesh, and unable to resist the impulse—the slight and delicate child, so lonely in

her desolate, abandoned misery, knelt before that cold figure of her unfeeling mother; and the simple heart registered a vow that, founded upon her innocent faith, seemed to point to surer happiness than any other.

"I will seek for *my Father!*" she cried; "he will not cast me off, it was never by his will. No more looking for strange friends, or purposeless knocking about the great grim world. I will search for my father; nor ever rest until I have discovered, and cast myself upon his love—he is far too good and noble to refuse to help me. The master of this place then is my father, God only knows how many miles away from here; but I must reach him somehow and in spite of perils intervening. I, a runaway of the Circus, and without a penny or advice. Oh! that my young friend would come, to advise, to help—"

"I can do both, my child!"

With a low cry 'Walter Gordon' rose to her feet, and turning in the direction of the voice, shrank into nothingness before a tall and venerable figure—imposing as one of Michael Angelo's prophets. So commanding and impressive a cast of features she had never seen before, while the eyes of the patriarch covered her with confusion. Powerless as a bird, she could not look above his silver beard, descending with that august symbolism of age which imparts dignity and inspires reverence.

"You seem in trouble; may I help you? shall I advise you?"

Commiseration was in the utterance; the child quivered to the kind expression.

"I thank you with all my heart, sir. I shall indeed be grateful for your help. I am alone in the world—having no home nor anywhere to go to,—even here I am hiding, and the very beasts of the field are better provided for; but I know that my parentage is noble, and I am trying to trace out my father, who was robbed of me when I was a very little child—"

It all came out, the full burden of her sorrow, all but the revelation of her sex. This man seemed so fatherly and dignified, there could be no risk in entreating his assistance.

"It is in my power to aid you, doubtless. I am Jael-Ishmael, King over the Gipsy tribes in England; you may join the band here stationed, if you will."

'Walter' shrank at the proposal; it did not seem any extensive improvement upon the Circus life this proposed casting in of lots with the nomads. The venerable personage noticed her hesitation.

"I thought it might provide you present food and shelter. True, ours is but a wild life amongst tents, but so much the more free, and the fact of our continuous travelling might aid your object better than remaining stationary. Should you know your father were he to cross your path?"

"Alas, no! I was so little, I fear I should not; I can but seek for that Lord Harold Lindon, once master of this house."

The other smiled a strange, quiet smile, which 'Walter' took to be indicative of pity.

"What are your wishes, sir? For I must be returning to my people."

'Walter Gordon' reflected. It was certain the acceptance of either of those situations mentioned by Lorry Vincent could not facilitate the tracing of Lord Lindon, and what meant that mysterious allusion to danger? She did not feel safe in Sleperton, and that instinctive and warning guide the super-sensitive carry in their bosoms, counselled departure now the opportunity offered. With a simple faith that moved the sage, although he did not betray emotion, 'Walter' put her small hand in that of Jael-Ishmael's, and said, fervently,—

"I will go with you; and God will watch over me."

The King over tribes, without more ado, led the way by a tangled and bramble-strewn path to the wood. His introduction was singular, and took this form:—

"The lad will be the guest of our tribe awhile, until I remove him to the work he may be fitted for."

Not long afterwards Lorry Vincent entered at the western door, saw the lantern had been removed, and, imagining his new friend was in one of the lower apartments, entered first one and then another; and was both surprised and alarmed

not to find the child in whom he was beginning to take so profound an interest. He then went upstairs, went over the whole house, until finding out the truth by that window opening upon the lawn, he looked serious; and, closing his teeth firmly, while his face flushed with anger, said to himself,—

"That's Reuben Smith's work again!"

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ADVERSARY IS CHECKMATED.

It was half-past nine in the evening, the mists were rising and gloom hovering above the Serpentine. Over the bridge which crosses the water nearest to Hyde Park Corner, people were idling homewards, a motley company of artisans and traders, of military, of showily-robed young females, of well-dressed disreputables, of honest, care-worn workwomen, and a few boys and girls. A gentleman was leaning against the iron-work, watching the passers-by with apparent indifference, but in reality with a keen, close scrutiny.

This was Herbert Garston, and exhibiting some impatience he opened a leather book, and, taking therefrom a letter, he read it over by such dim light as sufficed.

My dear Garston,

You will be surprised at this note,—please apply my oft-repeated injunction never to be surprised by anything. My life has been a series of surprises and shocks, and I have not yet ceased being both shocked and surprised, as you shall hear; that is, of course, admitting I am surprised now. If surprise were done away with, my dear boy, half the wickedness in the world would be banished, for surprise is the grandfather of impulse, and impulse is the parent of crime. But to proceed with the purpose of this note; and let me tell you, Herbert, if not surprised, I am disgusted. My house is watched by some vulgar spy; only think of a house in this *street, and with a Beresford in it, being watched! It strikes me your friend the Secretary has found out what we are up to, and has*

in turn placed a watch upon us; but worse than that, he has actually thwarted me—Me, sir,—in buying that Torquay property and in securing the child. He has, I believe, contrived to obtain both; but I can't write upon this—we must talk it over. —Meet me somewhere—say on the bridge over the Serpentine, at half-past nine, Monday evening—bridge nearest Hyde Park Corner. Don't be surprised if I do not come. Yours,

BERESFORD.

Mr. Garston replaced the note, saying to himself, with a pleasant smile,—

"Just one of his characteristic epistles, the dear old gentleman. No, I shall not be surprised if I don't see him here! I wonder how long he has been back from Hertfordshire! And I shall have some news for him too. If he is not careful, this cunning Secretary will find himself netted after all; from what I know and what I suspect, I shall not be surprised if we trap him!"

Mr. Garston was here addressed by a servant bearing a message from Mr. Beresford Travers.

"Your pardon, sir; my master sent me here. I was to give you this coupon; he is at the Opera, and will be pleased to see you in the box corresponding with the ticket."

Mr. Garston at once hastened away, and joined his friend behind the curtains of his private box.

"I don't know what you thought of my place of appointment, but I was anxious that we should be free from observation."

"I supposed so, and you thought this would be equally as appropriate and infinitely more agreeable; good! But to the purport of your note, which gives me some concern."

"Who can this be but Noel Barnard, and what his object unless it be to discover if you come to me or I to you? It is infamous, sir!"

"It will not annoy you much longer—the man is making the rope!"

Beresford Travers looked up at the dry, authoritative tone.

"Rope?"

"That will hang Noel Barnard, Esq. Never did a more eligible tenant wait that becoming end."

"Coarse, Herbert! But what do you mean?"

"First, relate your story."

"With pleasure! I went down to Beresford as you know. As usual the old scenes moved me sadly, I could not stay any length of time, but just long enough to settle 'stock and produce' matters with my steward, and to call upon the Percivals, with whom, you may remember, I intended placing the little girl. Following out my plan, I lost no time in travelling to Torquay, located myself at the Imperial, and the first local topic I heard mentioned was the purchase of Eagle Hall by Sir Kinnaird Dalton. I walked over to look at my poor dear boy's old home, and learned from a cottager that Ella and her child had actually passed a night in that emptied house, for every vestige of furniture has been removed. You may imagine my feelings when informed of this, but the worst of it is, upon that very night both mother and child mysteriously disappeared, or, at least, were never seen to leave Eagle Hall. Now mark: upon the morning afterwards, a tall dark gentleman, said to be the Secretary of the new proprietor, was seen in the neighbourhood very early, long before the arrival of the first train, and—and—in short, I connect the two!"—

Mr. Travers paused an instant; his companion had listened to the record of progress with eager attention. The curtain had fallen upon the third act of the opera, and then followed the usual stir amongst the audience; the orchestra retired, there was flutter of fans, and interchange of comment, adjusting of wraps, and moving for refreshments. Lovers of music, who preferred it without ices on the one hand, or stimulants on the other, closed their eyes, and again seemed to hear some choice *morceau* which had taken their fancy. The people who did not understand Italian were perusing the English libretto, endeavouring to gather sense, and reconcile the probabilities; and *habitués* were discussing the respective merits of the popular favourites. People who attend these representations for the spectacle, the *mise-en-scène* proper, made note of the main effects;

people who go to look at one another commented with freedom; and the inevitable couples who, doting on music, dote more on themselves, were intensely occupied. Those who visit the opera exclusively for the ballet, and who are proverbially difficult to satisfy, thought it a wretched swindle to pay so much and see so little; those of the free list, who are a specially fastidious class, thought they were as usual signed for a dull night; in fact, everywhere, there was tasteful confusion, and everybody seemed preoccupied with his own little gossip. With a cursory glance round, Mr. Beresford Travers resumed, Mr. Garston listening with close attention, and, as yet, passing no observation.

"Walking about those sweet Devon lanes, round old Cockington Church, along Tor Abbey's avenues, and over to that quaint, yet pretty nook, Paignton, I seemed to hear Lionel's voice again, singing one of those sacred melodies of which he used to be so fond; echoing between clefts of the rocks and stealing along the coast-line. The poor boy's voice haunted me with a reality startling even to myself. You are aware the Hall was the private property of Lionel's mother? We had, as you know, passed many very happy hours in the neighbourhood during my wife's lifetime: it is no wonder, therefore, if the associations proved affecting. I now come to the point I wished to consult with you upon. Anxious to observe matters from the distance, in such a way that my Lord Secretary should not suspect my proximity, I took up my quarters at a little inn at Paignton. How I passed the interval between dining and retiring to rest I don't know, for there was only a local news-sheet, a farmers' almanac, a discoloured map of the county, a list of fairs, and a stock-auctioneer's bill, wherewith to amuse myself. True, there was the alternative of joining the honest yeomen in the bar-parlour over their market budget, but I preferred retiring early; these details will weary you. Everything about my sleeping-room was scrupulously clean, the furniture old fashioned, the chintz terrific; but my attention was taken chiefly by the chimney-piece, surely as quaint a construction as any in Devon, while a rumbling of the wind down the chimney was a mild edition of contiguous thunder.

The wind increased in the night to such an extent I fancied old Boreas must have aroused himself in honour of my visit; any way it prevented my sleeping, if it did nothing more. But after awhile it did considerably more; I was galvanized into sitting up in bed, scared and speculating, for I distinctly heard something blown down the chimney, not heavy with the sound of masonry, but more the rustling, tumbling, slipping noise of a parcel or bundle. Now, I have a theory that people do not often put their goods and chattels up their chimneys, and it was not long before I had a light examining the parcel, with that unpleasant sensation one experiences when prepared for the worst. If I did not discover the worst, I revealed that which led up to a train of exceedingly unpleasing ruminations; for there, rolled up and carelessly tied with string and bound round with paper, was a child's frock. I examined the little garment, and in the pocket, Herbert, I found this handkerchief."—

Mr. Travers handed his friend a small hem-stitched lady's handkerchief, marked with the initials E. T. Herbert Garston touched it reverently and returned it immediately; his head drooped a degree lower, and he appeared very thoughtful. Again he reserved comment. Mr. Travers continued,—

"You will imagine I had no rest the remainder of that night. With the dawn I was abroad, glad to meet the freshening breeze on Paignton sands,—never was up so early before in my life, never want to be again—although of course it is eminently reviving for those who can stand it. Well, I went for a long walk, and returned to breakfast at my inn. Before entering, however, I walked over to a shop opposite, where furniture and carpets, pier-glasses and curtains, were displayed in the window. What for? you will say; the fancy occurred to me it might be well to inspect the exterior of my domicile, without exciting attention!"—

Mr. Garston nodded approvingly.

"One of the mirrors was slightly inclined, and from its position exactly caught the house where I had passed the night; and while apparently looking at the furniture exposed for sale, I minutely examined the building thus reflected.

One of the oldest of Paignton houses—the exterior, with its weather-worn sign and tawny bricks, was rather picturesque than not; flowers in fir-cone baskets, and a trail of the pretty thunbergia half-way over the portals; narrow, lozenged windows, with low muslin blinds and chintz curtains; and—prepare, my dear boy,—and guard against surprise—at one of the windows, a figure, that, unaware I was conscious of its presence, was intently watching my actions, it was—"

"*Le Diable?*"

Mr. Garston had spoken at last.

"Yes! Noel Barnard!—"

"Ay, and he is watching you now, look across!"

There, in an opposite box, sat the mysterious man whom all their cleverness seemed unable to outwit. Impassive as marble, merely studying a classical procession painted upon the proscenium. A quiet observer with a profile of strangely composed and thoughtful lines, a reserve of power firmly expressed about the brow, the mouth, and the eyes; without doubt the most noticeable figure in the building.

Anon, the stage was crowded by a chorus, who burst forth into loud strains of praise. The music of the act—the most imposing in the opera—caught the attention of even those least regardful of its melodious utterance, if the term be applicable to the majesty of "Le Prophète." It was the cathedral scene: with solemnity the procession filed across the stage, the gentle strains with their impressive burden quivering in that lyric temple, as in some mediæval Temple of the Cross. With marked effect, the scene had proceeded to the meeting of mother and son, even that calm saturnine spectator of the opposite box was pointing his *lorgnette* in the direction of the stage, when Mr. Travers leaned slightly over to Garston and remarked:—

"I must be going; I cannot sit it out with that man confronting us; tell me quickly if you are in possession of new data?"

"I had better write you at an early opportunity; meantime allow me to give you this. I cannot understand how a man of

Noel Barnard's foresight could be so careless; it was picked up in his study by the servant I am employing."

He handed the old gentleman a slip of blotting-paper, indicating at the same time the miniature glass suspended upon the partition of the box. Held before this the marks upon the paper took legible form, and Beresford Travers read,—

. . . . . there is but one way . . . . . the child must . . .
. . . . . I leave Torquay for town to . . . . .
. . . you will instruct Rolf to keep young Garston in . . . .
. . . I am aware of Travers's motive . . possession of the child
. . . . . meeting at the Seven Tuns on Friday night.

"Shall I keep this or will you?" asked Mr. Travers, biting his lip as he rose to leave.

"I will place it with my other links in the chain!" The gentlemen quitted the box.

The imperturbable watcher over the way, who had observed the proceedings with intense relish, merely twisted his *lorgnette* to a clearer focus, with the congratulatory apothegm—

"I think that example of finesse could not have operated more advantageously!"

CHAPTER XVII.

GABRIELLE.

If the reader at any time, in coming from the terminus of the Great Western Railway, has, by chance, accident, or design, penetrated the privacy of Queen Street, Paddington, he may have been struck by the extreme gentility of that neighbourhood. Two long terraces of white-fronted houses; two long rows of gardens some Horticultural Society might have in its particular keeping, so neatly arranged is every flower-bed, so carefully removed is each dead leaf, dry twig, large stone, and worm-upheaved mound; and two long lines of elaborately-painted and richly-grained doors, with two long chains of highly burnished knockers.

The coster fraternity avoid Queen Street upon principle; the barrel-organ never makes a descent upon its inviolate quietude; it is the haven of rest for people with distracted nerves, and it is much frequented by thinkers.

There is advantage in residing in a street of this description. Rents are moderate, rates and taxes not oppressive; there are no nocturnal brawlings, nor yet a public-house within a stone's throw; the dwellings are so pitched that there is every convenience for studying one's neighbours; and there is agreeable scarcity of itinerant vendors and mendicants.

Half the residents of this calm quarter go to church, the other half sit behind the curtains and pass remarks upon the appointments and properties of the devotional portion; after which they retire to shady back rooms and sleep again.

No piano, organ, or harmonium awakens the echo in Queen Street.

"At the parlour window of No. 9," etc.—Page 139.

We have business with the residents in two of these houses. Upon either side the way, they are within view of each other's windows. The postal number says 9 to the house upon the right hand, 180 to that upon the left; both houses are the pink of respectability. At the parlour window of No. 9 is often seen a fair, slight girl of prepossessing appearance and remarkably lady-like manners; she is working sometimes, more frequently reading a manuscript; sometimes the fair, slight girl holds up sugar or groundsel to her bird, when it is remarked that her figure is symmetrical, her attitude graceful, her action endearing and winning. It is also remarked that when the sun falls upon that side it circles about her head like an aureole, her beautiful brown hair, of the warm tone Titian loved, is always arranged with excess of neatness; that her dresses are of the quietest colours, with narrow tuckers of good lace; and that she wears no jewellery. Sometimes when bending over the manuscript she is so often reading, the clearly-cut features take upon them the delicacy, and refinement, and thought, familiar to us who love the Beatrice, the Joan, and the Lady Grey, of Delaroche; yet are they mobile features, and, if intellectual and spiritual, are often lighted by vivacity and animation. Her cousin, George Percival, the writer of the manuscript, painting this fair being in one of his novels, thus expressed himself, "Gabrielle; an almost ideal character, but sufficiently human to be interesting." Leave the description there, it is from the hand of a lover-cousin, and cannot be improved upon by garnishing of fine description. All these Percivals were thorough, there was no shade of affectation about any of them; they came of a stock that despised the unreal; brave, and honest, and self-sacrificing, with hearts loving and true. George, the author-cousin, is the son of well-to-do parents, farmers down in Hertfordshire; the family had been tenants of the Beresfords for generations, and were regarded by Mr. Travers with much esteem. George Percival lives with his uncle until such time as himself and the fair girl go forth, as these children do, to form a home for themselves. They have been together from boy and girl-hood, and in homely language their country friends have

declared them cut out for one another. George Percival holds an excellent position as Manager of the London and Olympian Bank; he has worked his way up to this, and the responsible dignity is deservedly merited. Not a young man in London is more respected by the Directors; and not only these, but also the gentlemen under him, hold George Percival in affectionate regard, for he is ever ready to help a young man on, and would at any time go out of his way to do a service for them or his employers. Thus, when their chief clerk was taken ill and died, he did the man's work in addition to his own, without a word; until the new clerk came, a reserved but diligent worker, named Stephen Miles, who gained Percival's confidence by his steadiness and quietness. Come in when he would, Stephen was always at the methodical penmanship; such principle wins favour of those at the head. Not long after the appointment of Stephen Miles—whose references and testimonials, by the way, were a mile long—a fresh depositor had been entered upon the books. The name was written *Noel Barnard, Esq.*, 180, *Queen Street, Paddington*. It was not a large amount, one hundred pounds or thereabouts; sufficient to constitute the gentleman a depositor.

One day the fair girl sitting at the window saw a neat little conveyance stop at 180. A quick-stepping horse with silver harness, driven by an expensively-attired lady, parasol on whip, reins firm in hand, colour on cheek, audacity in her eye; an elegant vehicle of bijou proportions, of fairy-like lightness, furnished throughout with the luxury of a boudoir. In the rear was a page, or tiger, with a fair girl face, lithe limbs, faultless livery, and wicked laughing eyes bent upon the steed held in dainty control. It was a tasteful, albeit questionable conveyance, and people in Queen Street ventured upon little wagers with themselves anent the proprieties; yet 180 was one of the quietest houses in the street, and the tall gentleman there resident, who was so seldom seen, the most decorous of all the genteel householders. There were lady writers of the quieter order in Queen Street, and these were of opinion this bold intruder upon their calm track was one of those

daring novelists whose characters are all sketched from the improper point of view, whose scenes are vivid rhapsodies of the vicious, and whose journeying through life they imagine to be of this silver-harness and chiming-bells order of progress.

The fair girl saw the lady enter the house opposite, remain some little time, and return to her conveyance with one of the most eccentric-looking characters ever seen in Queen Street. He had never been observed to enter at 180, and no person knew of his staying there; hence this departure aroused commotion, and more than one tea-table was enlivened beyond precedent, somewhat as follows:—

"But who is he, my dear? And do you know any one who saw him go in?"

"Alas, no; we can learn positively nothing. There is something vastly mysterious about the occurrence, and yet he is such a nice-looking gentleman who lives there, so aristocratic and ministerial. Do you know I somehow fancy he is not aware of that person calling? Perhaps the strange-looking individual is his servant, and this woman a loose connexion. Alas, we live in a wicked and deceitful world; but I do think the dear gentleman who lives there ought to be told of it, so pleasant as he looks, and so soft-spoken. Poor Bella is quite in love with him!"

"Now, I think he is a merchant in the City, probably, with a house in the country; we know he has something to do with the City, for we have seen him in one of the Friday Street warehouses when we have been waiting for Papa."

"I think your Papa said to my Papa that he had a warehouse of his own, and that it was a firm trading under the style of Barnard, Rolf, and Co."

"Yes, in Indian produce, costly shawls, and such like."

"Perhaps the odd-looking man is Mr. Rolf?"

"I shouldn't wonder!"

Once when George Percival returned home from the day's duties, he brought Mr. Miles to dine. He was a colourless gentleman, and his hair might have grown upon one of the bank ledgers, so indistinct was its shading. His eyes had a

habit of turning up in the most extraordinary fashion, producing a creeping sensation upon the beholder; however, as he seldom looked at any one, and rarely lifted his eyes, this was the cause of but slight inconvenience; his fellow-clerks accounted for his preoccupation by supposing him always engaged in intuitive calculation. Mr. Percival, who was a reader of character, thought differently. Once the chief clerk had alluded in a reverent, dimly affectionate sort of manner, to a widowed mother, and George, dearly loving his own kind-hearted Christian mother, away down there in Hertfordshire, judged by himself, and believed Stephen to have her health and loneliness at heart.

Gabrielle Percival did not take to Mr. Miles; perhaps it was the touch of his hand, which was cold and clammy, perhaps that odd look about the eyes which turned her cold also; or it may have been the insipid and indefinite tints, for Gabrielle liked some expression in a man: any way she kept as remote from Mr. Miles as politeness would admit.

Do not suppose this pair of cousins tallied with the cousin-lovers of the novelists and dramatists, the stock relations who are so ardent in their attachment, so young and handsome, so recklessly impassioned. These good people were never exuberant in that way; they were neither of them under thirty, both of them possessed practical good sense, both of them were patient and steady-going workers. Of the two, perhaps, George possessed most romance in his composition, as was natural, being a writer. He had been rather successful with his books, and was beginning to be widely read, owing doubtless to the absence of vulgarity upon the pages, and the sensitiveness and refinement which he always considered superior to breadth and effect.

"You write a great deal, Mr. Percival?" said Stephen Miles, after dinner, his hand upon the manuscript Gabrielle had laid upon the author's writing-table.

"Yes, I write; I find it pleasant and congenial leisure work."

"Ah! Very pretty; had I the brains, I would do the same. Of course you don't write under your own name! Might I

ask with what well-known *nom de plume* I may identify you? I should much like to read some of your work."

"Sorry to refuse you, but that is the property of my publishers; I am rather fastidious upon points of honour!"

"Ah, very right; I admire your principles, and while I agree with the reserve, humbly ask your pardon for the inquisitiveness. Your album, Miss Percival? Yes, very pretty; I do like these collections of treasured family faces; alas! we cannot bring the departed back again; we can but preserve 'the shadow ere the substance fade.'" And the visitor softly used a lizard-green pocket-handkerchief, giving his eyes that awful roll, ten times more electrifying than a thunderstorm.

Mr. Percival was glancing down the Review column of a paper; the visitor had the album open at the portrait of a little girl, some distant relative's child, and this the gentleman was good enough to pronounce,—

"Very pretty,—adds to the interest of any album,—you are fond of children, Mr. Percival?"

He was alluding to George's well-known partiality for the little ones, who took all his stray coins and kisses, and regarded him as very like the prince of their dreams. The respectable widow woman in charge of the Bank offices had one little girl, and being an amiable and pretty child, the Manager made much of her. It was sweet pleasure to turn from the dry, matter-of-fact accounts, at such times as he left the office or bank-parlour for the inner rooms, to the innocent poetry of the child. For to this higher-strung nature all the movements and manners of childhood were rhythmical and beautiful, and all the words, and lisping, and laughter, were filled musically and with the tenderest of minstrelsy.

George looked quietly up from the Review.

"Yes, sir; I agree with Southey that no house is properly furnished without them."

Gabrielle was engaged upon some plain sewing. She stretched the work and made it even and level, and resumed her stitching.

What a calm nature it appeared, as unlike as could be to

those storm-shaken souls, with their emotional depths, one reads about and meets day after day!

Gabrielle well knew all George's partiality for childhood. He had few secrets from her. To some extent she sympathized, looked upon it in a large measure as an author's hobby; and knew, moreover, the men of the City, plodding all day amongst the dull tracts where never a child is seen, were most of them child-lovers. So she listened pleasantly and fell in with George's views, and thought it a dainty, albeit extravagant fancy, when he one evening told her he should some day perhaps adopt a little girl. True she had just looked up, with the grave, kind eyes, and said,—

"Shall I not be enough, George?"

Whereat Cousin George, all undisturbed, replied,—

"Perhaps so; but you are different, you know; grown up and wise and good—"

"And a little old, George, to supply the place of a child in your house!" Said so quietly, with the plain sewing, like a down stitching of reproach and regret.

"Well, of course one does not supply the place of the other, nor would we wish it to. A child is the completion of the charm of a house. Woman is the grace, the goodness, the wisdom of home—childhood its sunshine, its music, its beauty. I intend in my next book to have a child or children prominent in some ideal sense."

"I don't think it will do, dear!" in the same quiet tone, shaking the head with gentle gesture of dissent. "You are so fond of children, I fear you would over-do the theme. People are realistic over this matter, and are rather jealous if boy or girl be exalted to the dignity of a hero or heroine."

"Nay, such is not my signification of prominence. I would ever keep children children, else would the savour of childhood be lost. But seriously, you underrate the part they play in Literature and Art. How does the introduction of a child soften a painting or a poem! And some of the best poets and most courted of painters have had their reputation created by their child-pieces. I remember Mr. Charles Dickens once saying 'Children made my fortune.' I do not think

people are half so insensible to their charms, when introduced in the Arts, as you imagine. I notice at the Academy the public are quickest caught by, and stand in greatest number before, the child pieces. I have found upon the Stage the most successful plays have depended upon child-performers for those shadings of pathos and beauty which have taken hold upon the sympathies of the audience. I am told the greatest run upon novels at the Libraries is for such books as contain the poetry of love in childhood; and I must say in life I think that it is a poor and common-place history if never influenced by a child."

"You plead the cause of your little favourites with eloquence. I have no doubt there is many a child a comfort to many a heart not its parent, within which *it alone* preserves the human and the good."

"Thanks, dear, for agreeing with me so far. I thought you would,—you are so sensible."

"What will you entitle your work?"

"The other day, when coming home upon the omnibus, I passed a drawing-room window, where, upon a table, was some china, apparently of age and value. In the centre was a vase of delicate white and pink flowers. Seated by the window were two ladies and some pretty boys and girls. You know I weave something of everything,—the combination struck me,—and I seized upon the title—

FLOWERS AND CHINA

for my book, which should have a more significant depth than the mere ephemeral story of the hour."

"'*Flowers and China*,'—a quaint title. Reminds me of Richter's 'Flower, Fruit, and Thorn Pieces.'"

"It will traverse other ground. I select the title for these reasons: A Flower is the symbol of Youth; China of Age; both, of delicacy and beauty. Life may be compared with a garden, or a collection of rare porcelain. It is all a pageant of colour. The kinship of china and flowers borrows beauty of grouping: that is unique which is ideal by contrast. While Man,—Woman,—Child, may be broken rhythm, and yet perfect sonance, of an opera of love and pain; Man—

Child may be the clearer yet less common strain, and the pain be crowned by love, while but a reed may lend the music. Life hath more features yet than books have chronicled, songs sung, or paintings idealized. There is that more bitter than loss, more desolate than loneliness, when the flower hath forgotten its perfume, and the china is robbed of its music. A revelry of sweet shapes, a clustered glow of sensitive colour, the ringing chimes of delicious vessels, sculptured symmetry of goblets and broad beauty of ewers, lily vases and a threading of silver, cerulean idyls by strong tracks of gold, dense purple and pale yellow roses looped and enmeshed in a net of forget-me-nots, a scattering of daisy and wild violet bloom upon the moss,—I see a wondrous picture, idyl and poem, and composed of nothing but flowers and china!"

She had let the work fall and had given herself to listening to this half-allegoric talk, in which he sometimes indulged during those precious seasons of their being alone together, but which she more often read from his writing. It was all as a revelation to her, more full of the poetical than the practical, yet possessing a charm she would not have confessed to any one.

Mr. Stephen Miles was still turning the leaves of Miss Percival's album, when the master and mistress of the house arrived home from an afternoon's shopping.

Mr. Percival, a genial and kind-hearted man, who had made a large fortune at book-selling, looked very naturally in a kind-hearted manner upon his nephew's fancy for authorship, although he often counselled,—"Stick to the figures, George, don't write too much!"

Mrs. Percival was a copious edition of the worthy bookseller; perhaps a degree less gentle in her manner, a degree less mild in her opinion; but, taken for all in all, a not unworthy prototype. Certainly the lady had prejudices; but then so have we all; and one of these prejudices took the form of an inveterate aversion to the reptilish; anything, as Mrs. Percival expressed it, from a cockroach to a crocodile, giving her the trembles!

Thus, when her own warm hand encountered that so cold and clammy of Stephen Miles, she felt, as she told Percival

later, "as if her hour had come!" An effect that received its full force upon his turning the awful orbs with their most diabolic roll. From that moment Mrs. Percival resolved "that young man shouldn't dine again at their table. Why, she would be dreaming of snakes and all sorts of viperous things for nights!"

Mr. Percival, who had heard Nephew George commend the chief clerk for his business qualifications, was not thus impressed, and mildly told his wife it was another of her prejudices. He had combated them in his counter days, when the more cautious half deliberately declined opening an account with such of their customers as she did not like the look of.

"But, gracious me! Never a one entered our shop all the time we were in business, who made me feel so creepy as that friend of George's, who is more like a ichneumon than a man, and with a twist to his eyes I'll see in the dark for nights to come. I'm glad I haven't money in their bank, for I'd never put any more in. I never did have faith in George's judgment about people; he's too wrapped up in his writing to be alive to the crawling things of the earth."

In the course of conversation the holidays were spoken of. George Percival had recently returned from a month in Hertfordshire; the other gentlemen of the Bank were upon the *qui-vive* as to their own term.

"You found it very quiet, sir, in that part of the country?" And Mr. Miles indulged in one of those ocular displays significant of a picture of the quiet Hertfordshire tract held in reserve within.

"I take interest, for home association sake, in all connected with the country; apart from this, I did not find the time hang heavily on my hands."

A curious change, all in a moment, flashed across George Percival's face, the thoughtfulness seeming to give place to an expression of joyousness that died away again upon the instant; but not before it was observed by Stephen Miles.

They were sitting by the window; the most refreshing air

Paddington yields in her border days between summer and autumn floated in amongst the flowers Gabrielle took such great pride over. A brougham drove up to No. 180, and the tall inhabitant was seen to alight and assist from the vehicle a delicate-looking boy of prepossessing appearance, who walked slowly, and as though far from strong.

"Who now, I wonder?" exclaimed Mrs. Percival, who was standing behind her daughter's chair. "They're a curious lot over the way! That Mr. Barnard is a gentleman I would be sorry to have much to do with."

The visitor rolled his eyes over in the direction of the gentleman ringing the bell opposite, and, while waiting, the gentleman looked across the way, and, possibly, encountered that singular expression. He placed a hand paternally upon the child's head, at the same moment the door was opened from within, and Noel Barnard, with 'Walter Gordon,' entered and was lost to sight.

"A new apprentice to the wholesale!" remarked Mr. Percival, Senior; "I hope they will make a good man of business of him. Figures and work, Mr. Miles; nothing like figures and work!"

"Percival," said Mrs. Percival with majesty, "at our time of life, for goodness sake let us have done with figures!"

"True, my dear; but one cannot see a youth like that, in all probability fresh from the country, entering upon a mercantile life in this crowded City, without experiencing some sort of interest."

The visitor raised his hand benevolently; and quietly and approvingly remarked,—

"Your sentiments do you much honour, sir. The industries of this Empire present a sublime example of the indefatigable activity of the great thinkers and workers. Middle-class society is composed of very worthy men, Mr. Percival!"

Mr. Percival nodded pleasantly, rubbing his hands, and taking it as in part compliment to himself. Mrs. Percival, however, walked away to her house-keeping with the shrewd rejoinder,—

"Worthy enough till you find them out, I dare say."

The visitor shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say it was an indisputable fact that there was a considerable number of people about who would not obtain the highest of references. Soon afterwards he took his leave, and the lady of the house breathed again.

Gabrielle sat late in her chamber that night, thinking. Sat by the open window, looking out over the grey panorama, with its curves and lines of light; with windows of a small street at their back where court-yards met their gardens, growing black and still, one by one. Thinking of her future, with that placid gentleness which was so eminently her characteristic, but thinking more seriously than she had ever done before. She had been so happily restful in regard to George, the thought never occurred to her until this evening: what if he, after all, found himself mistaken in his supposed abiding love for her? What if it should prove the sequence of years passed in each other's gentle company? What if, upon some sudden crisis in his life, he should centre his affections upon some other object? Where would she be then, and with what prospect, save a memory all sad and bitter pain, would be left to her? Time was flitting, her youth had vanished like a dream, almost uncounted in the pleasant waiting; ever with him, she had troubled little, and had never visited at the houses of others, or been even for once in the company of another; it was because her love induced that satisfied repose which is the very perfection of the sentiment. It was only the shadow of restraint, the merest hint of the reserved, in her cousin's manner had led to this; but it was a clouding which, though no larger than a man's hand, yet assumed formidable proportions from its very rarity. Then she comforted herself,—

"I am sure George would tell me if there was anything."

Next day, sitting at her window, long after both George and their opposite neighbour had gone off to the City, the fair girl, not yet recovered from her thinking fit, saw 'Walter Gordon,' whom they had noticed entering the house of Mr. Noel Barnard the previous evening, also sitting by the window,

seeming very dejected, and looking wistfully across at the gentle and lovable face, as though she would like to fly and nestle beside her while she confided all the heart was full of. And Gabrielle's heart moved her to some expression of interest.

"I believe he is all alone; if it did not look bold, I would go over to him, for I am sure the boy is wretched; I should like to beckon him."

She did put up her hand, but the forwardness of the action, from the neighbours' point of view, checked her implied sympathy.

"If it had been any other house! But I am half afraid of offending that man; and after all I have no right to interfere. Dear mother would tell me to mind my own business."

Still that lonely and uncared-for look upon the face smote her, for Gabrielle was quick to discern grief, and sensitively took the sorrows of others unto herself. She looked across again and saw that the child was weeping, and she could restrain herself no longer, so she signalled, inviting the child with all the energy of her affectionate heart. In the fact of the childhood lies the excuse.

At first 'Walter' did not seem to understand the movement, and then when it was repeated was hesitative and timorous, yet rose as about to comply with the invitation. Nodding with a reassuring smile, Gabrielle rose also as though waiting, and the child hurried across the street and was tenderly received by this new friend. Thus simply are some of the most complex schemes thrown out of order.

CHAPTER XVIII.

'WALTER GORDON' FINDS A STAUNCH FRIEND.

GABRIELLE took the child's slender hands within her own, and saying some kind and welcoming word, led her to a seat removed from observation.

"You have been suffering, you are not well; I could not help asking you to come; I saw you were unhappy!"

"Heaven bless you, dear lady, for your kind notice; I was indeed feeling unutterably miserable.

"Because you have been brought from home to learn the business?"

The child shuddered and covered the pretty face with her hands.

"If that can be called a business which is ignoble subjection to the base purposes of intrigue, then I am too truly learning the business!"

"But Mr. Barnard—I thought him a merchant in the City—"

"He is everything, and everywhere. He is I believe the Evil One in person,—such is the opinion of the wise readers of the stars of whom he is Chief; they fear him, hate him, yet hold his equal has not been seen in modern times; he is certainly clever—the ravelled skein of his contriving would require more than one, two, or three to unwind. He has me entirely in his hands. I am homeless, fatherless. I seek both. It is to aid this search that I am in his possession; he has promised me his assistance."

"And you can take that man's word?"

"Yes. I do not think he would break his word with friend or foe; his is a singular nature, so many qualities are at

variance one with another. I believe he will assist me, but first make liberal use of my services in his own interest; and these I should not begrudge were it for honourable work, but what he requires of me is repelling to my every sense of right, truth, and justice!"

The words, older than the apparent youth of the speaker seemed to warrant, led Gabrielle to look more intently at the slightly formed creature, and then the quick eyes of her sex detected the disguise.

"You, yourself, are scarcely what you seem, I think—"

"I will explain in a few words:—I have escaped from hard taskmasters of a travelling Circus; you can imagine why I have assumed this boy's dress, which has thus far proved so much in my favour; I am apprenticed to them, and if I am traced shall be severely punished."

"But it is terrible being subject to this strange man, whose intentions, you infer, are evil in the extreme—"

"Nay, I would not vouch thus far. I simply say he seems to have the resources of twenty detective offices at his fingers' ends, and to make use of almost every one he comes in contact with, independent of his especial clerks or servants."

"I am afraid my power to help you is very slight, but anything that I can do, I will."

"Can you help me to escape from that man?"

"To do that you would require somewhere to go to!" Gabrielle reflected, and not least of the points of her forethought had reference to Mr. Barnard himself; it was unadvisable to make an enemy of a man who, in pursuit of his object or purpose, was evidently accustomed to put aside all conventional principles, and utterly to disregard all the ordinary dictates of humanity. But then again came in her desire to aid this forlorn boy-girl whose pitiful life she might be the means of brightening, and Gabrielle was ever ready to minister to the suffering and the oppressed.

"I think, perhaps, if I wrote to my uncle and aunt in Hertfordshire, they would be glad to have you there; of course about a farm-house there are many light employments you

could undertake very well, and I have no doubt you would be happy and comfortable. I will write this very day!"

'Walter's' gratitude knew no bounds; seizing her new friend's hand, she kissed it with that touching respect and homage which is the very ideal of devotion; she then, for prudence sake, returned to her position at the opposite window, and not long afterwards Gabrielle saw Mr. Noel Barnard's housekeeper enter from her morning's marketing. The domestic manager of his house might have been carved after his own design from adamant. It may safely be asserted there was but one woman of her kind upon the globe, and that one woman Noel Barnard had, by instinct, unearthed. Very soon after the woman's entrance, the child disappeared, and Gabrielle did not see her again all that day; she, however, wrote the promised letter, pleading the cause of her *protégée* with simple yet impressive eloquence, and she sent this to the post at once, fearful of her little one's removal.

When George came home she told him what she had done, only reserving, as she had reserved in her letter, the fact of the child's sex, being entreated to do so by the girl herself; believing moreover, with her, that this would but excite a prejudice against her in the minds of those she was seeking to interest. To her surprise George seemed anything but favourably impressed; he said he would rather she had waited his return, and that he thought in quiet country places, the advent of a stranger under any but openly declared circumstances was sure to be noticed; he hoped his father would recognize this, and write declining.

"Why, George, this *is* unlike you, generally so willing to help the troubled!"

"So I am in this instance, I but object to the boy's going to my father's, because—I don't see what use he will be—and—and—I should not like them to get into any trouble at their time of life; I am thinking of the proprietor of the Circus."

"Did you notice the child last night?"

"Yes, a pretty boy; why?"

"I fancied his appearance might plead for him!"

That evening and the next George sat close at his writing. One day Gabrielle caught a glimpse of her little friend, and she was glad, for it told her she was still there.

In due course came Uncle Percival's letter; yes, he would receive the lad into his house, and "your aunt will see what she can make of him."

The question now was how to communicate this piece of good news. Eagerly did the fair helper watch for the housekeeper's going out, but this only happened once a week when the sphinx transacted her seven days' business with precise and expeditious regularity. However, to be in readiness, Gabrielle made a little parcel of the letter and ten shillings in silver; but how to transfer this to the object of her kind aid was the difficulty. The next time she saw her she held it up to prepare her for its reception; the child signed to the other end of the room as it seemed, but after she had gone from the window, upon thinking it over, Gabrielle came to the conclusion it was the back garden she wished to direct her attention to; then Gabrielle set her wits to work.

Behind the opposite terrace she knew very well there was a line of small houses with back yards, corresponding with those at the rear of their own house. She might, upon some pretext, gain access to the yard at the back of No. 180; she must count the houses to make certain of the one; when in the yard, she could throw the parcel over into Mr. Barnard's garden, where she must depend upon good fortune for its being discovered by the right person. Had Gabrielle possessed more cunning and subtlety she would have devised a much better method than this; but simple and ingenuous as she was, it struck her on the spur of the moment as the best plan to follow, and she at once put on her bonnet and mantle for the performance of her design.

It was a very mean and narrow street, where laundresses seemed to have drifted in a colony. She counted off the houses with the accuracy of a tax-collector, and found the house she was looking for belonged to a laundress also. It was necessary to devise some excuse for her calling, and Gabrielle could think of nothing better than proposing to

send the woman some of their rough washing, dusters and tea-cloths and articles of that description. She knocked, and the brawny mistress of the house came to the door; the lady said she had called about some washing, and was civilly invited to step inside; then the lady said she would like to send a few things once a fortnight,—upon Mondays, and—could she see the yard? The woman hesitated. "We haven't much drying-ground, ma'am, but of course you know what London is, very different to the country where I was brought up; but though we're small, we're clean and hairy!"

"It will be more satisfactory to see it—if you don't mind?"

"Not at all, ma'am, step through please, and mind your 'ed; you'll excuse the cinder-bin, my good man was about emptying it this morning, only I 'ad to send some linen 'ome to a large school I washes for!"

It was the most diminutive chicken-walk that ever was seen, beautifully unadorned, and edged after the advanced juvenile school, with oyster shells; the mound to which the woman had drawn extenuating attention was of formidable dimensions, and was the habitual castle defended by half of the laundress's children, while the other half attacked and besieged with energy and fury. At the end some scarlet runners afforded pretext for walking up to the same with a kind word appreciative of their growth. Having asked the woman for a card which she went indoors to procure, Gabrielle seized the time, and standing by the beans deftly threw the parcel over.

Almost on the instant there appeared from the other side, towering above the wall, a head, which frightened Gabrielle, (so unexpected was its arrival), as much as do the ogre heads of pantomime those innocent mortals who are supposed to venture too near their retreats.

It was the head of the owner of the garden, surmounted by an elaborately worked smoking-cap; cigar in mouth, dressing-gown upon his shoulders, and in his white hand a beautifully bound volume.

"Permit me!" and with the utmost politeness he handed

the lady the small parcel. Piqued beyond description, Gabrielle took this from him and at the same moment saw the child at an upper window. Mr. Barnard bowed to the lady, and the lady bowed to Mr. Barnard, while the laundress, standing hands on hips, appeared to be of opinion there was still more going on in the world than her philosophy dreamed of. Then the owner of the garden glided gently down to his rustic seat, lifted his long legs American fashion, gracefully adjusted his gown beside him, allowed a hand to caress the ferns by the garden chair, leaned his head back, and then went comfortably off to sleep.

Miss Percival, meantime, regained her presence of mind, and, courteously thanking the woman, made for home, more than ever alert in the interests of 'Walter Gordon.'

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREY DAWN OF LOVE.

"MRS. BRANDON?"

"My love!"

"The yacht is still in our waters; I saw it to-day."

"Indeed?" The pale woman lifted her large black eyes, and sighed, then, removing a white rose from her bosom, she laid it upon the table with tantalizingly poetic effect. Lena threw herself upon a chair, and, rapping its back with the vehemence of an auctioneer, she exclaimed,—

"You do put me out so with those lackadaisical ways; I would ever so much rather you would start up, and whistle, or scream, or—anything, rather than that cold, calm, unmoved manner. I do hate you when you're like that, and as you're generally so, there isn't much love lost."

"Miss St. Aubyn is not growing more lady-like, I am sorry to say!"

"Miss St. Aubyn is not growing at all; Miss St. Aubyn has received orders to stop growing; Papa said to me to-day, looking almost as dismal as yourself, 'How much I would give could I but keep my little girl as she is at present!'"

"And what did you say? 'I will always be your own dear little girl, Papa'?"

"No, I didn't! I said, 'I am not your little girl now, Papa. I'm grown a great big girl, and I don't mean to have out my doll any more, or tease pussy, or eat the preserves; I'm going to be sedate and ugly, like Mrs. Brandon,' that's what I said, dear, and I suppose I was rude as usual!" and

without waiting for the reply—she was in one of her wicked moods—Lena turned her back upon the housekeeper.

Hortense Brandon shrugged her shoulders, but showed no resentment beyond a sarcastic smile, and quietly trifling with the locket suspended at her throat; she could put up with a great deal of Miss Lena's plain speech without betraying annoyance.

"And what did Papa say?"

"Oh, he became so pale, I thought the bad head-ache he suffered from the day after that dreadful man was here whom Mr. Barnard sent off, had returned; and I went and put my arms round his neck, my naughtiness quite gone, and tried to coax him back to colour—"

"Good girl!"

"He flushed, and sitting down took me upon his knee, looking so mournfully into my face; and he said,—

"'I have somewhere heard or read, my Lena, that when a girl gives up her doll, it is to love something else!'

"So then, with my arm round his neck, I answered as lovingly as ever I could,—

"'What more, my dear Papa, than to give extra love to you?'"

"That was very pretty and very good of you. Papa liked that of course?"

"I think so—he kissed me!" said Lena, facing the lady again. "Soon afterwards he seemed to be thoughtful, and all at once said,—

"'I had a dream—a curiously painful dream, last night, Lena; I dreamt that you were lost to me!'"

Mrs. Brandon pushed her footstool a little away from her as by a movement of impatience, dropping stitches, pricking herself, and feeling her breath come short and sharp.

"'What a strange dream, Papa!' I said; 'it comes of that man forcing himself in upon you.'

"'Yes, but that shall never happen, my darling, shall it? even if any one tried to take you from me? Ah, Lena, is there a more terrible misfortune in this world than the loss of a child; I will not say by death, but when stolen from one?'

"I did not know what to say, for I had never thought about it; I kissed Papa again, assured him he should never, never, never lose his Lena; slipped down, just ran to take one peep at the yacht, and—came in to you, you dear disagreeable old thing."

There was a pause of some minutes. It was very warm, Lena lazily cooled herself with a fan that fluttered with Indian feathers and gleamed with Indian gems. Upon a side-table was a dish of iced pine-apple, and the young lady proceeded to devote herself to this with a languid enjoyment.

"Lena?"

"Mrs. Brandon!" The red lips moist with juice of the cool fruit, the little mouth quite full while she replied.

"I suppose you have no sort of recollection of your dear Mamma? Of course, you are aware I did not know poor Mrs. St. Aubyn!"

"Yes—I've a very strong recollection of Mamma. I remember her tall figure, her grace, her calmness—not a dead-and-alive sort of calmness like yours, but the elegance and impassive tranquility of some empress. I remember her haughty type of beauty, her cold, cruel nature. I can scarcely remember, but I do not think I loved her, I stood in too great awe of her."

Mrs. Brandon had listened with eagerness painful in its intensity, but she was compelled to preserve an appearance of indifference, knowing well how erratic her young informer was. She might at any moment dart off at a tangent and never be led back to the subject. Therefore she said, with well-assumed carelessness,—

"I am surprised to hear you say *cruel*, my love!"

"But I remember her being cruel to me, putting me from her with bitter words, and as though hating, from her heart of hearts, to have me near her; don't you call that cruelty? And I also remember a dreadful scene with Papa, and yet I sometimes think, *not* with Papa, but there is a dim uncertainty about this I never can get right; I do believe my memory becomes more and more indistinct the older I grow."

"Naturally, you are further removed from the pictures of your youth!"

"I suppose that is it; and speaking of pictures, the set-out was all about a picture, the miniature of a fair-haired, lovely girl, Mamma one day caught Papa looking at over his desk, and she was so angry, and there were such cutting words interchanged, I have never forgotten the affair."

"Of course you do not recollect the name of the young lady whom the picture represented!" The pale woman hunted all over her work-basket for a button.

"I recollect because Mamma taunted Papa, and went on at him until he hurled the name at her as it were—"

"And it was—"

Mrs. Brandon's eagerness got the better of her policy, and defeated itself.

"And it was—no business of Mrs. Brandon's!" exclaimed the provoking girl, with a merry laugh. "But I'll just tell you the initials, because that won't matter, you know—they were—*E. T.*"

Lena idled into the garden; Mrs. Brandon wrote *E. T.* upon her tablet.

"Ella Travers!" sang Lena, seating herself in her favourite cavity under shade of shrubs and trees, and dangling one hand over the cliff's edge on trail for wild flowers.

CHAPTER XX.

THE MAN THEY THOUGHT MAD.

ROMANTIC is the only word conveying the experience in the curious, the eccentric, and the pathetic, which certain parishes afford the student of human life. The Minister is a privileged person. Possessed of tact and courteous gentleness, he may penetrate where no other dares to follow, regions practically sealed to all but himself and the Doctor. His questions are not commonly regarded as intrusive, and as a rule his appearance is not greeted with the frowns and bearishness of manner some people represent.

In a tolerably varied visiting experience, over a thickly populated area comprising all classes, from the lesser tradespeople down to the utterly destitute, Westley Garland had met with every possible kind of reception, and every describable and indescribable type of character, the records of which were as significant as the deepest of poetic dramas.

Such study imparts a curious review of life—almost a grotesque pageant of human nature. Sermons are not as eloquent and not so convincing as are such unvarnished records. Homilies unspoken and unwritten lie broadcast in the parish, and this is the largest library of divinity in the world. The parish may be a world in itself. The chronicle of one house is more enthralling, sometimes, than the most absorbing of fictions. The history of a terrace is a panorama of all human joys and woes. The mature experience of a street may teach a man more than he will learn in all the remainder of the universe. A year's labour in devious City ways is fraught with quiet yet strong expression, and intimate acquaintance

with idiosynerasy and physiology, with eccentricity and the singular.

With the exception of Lady Guilmere—an old friend, as he explained to his curate, the Rev. Spencer Webb—Mr. Garland did not visit the houses of the wealthy. No, his pastoral out-of-doors service was conferred solely upon those who had nothing but bare thanks to offer in return, and very often he departed without any thanks at all.

One narrow street was especially interesting to him, for sake of one house and the tenant of one room in that house. Look in upon this :—

An elderly man seated at a table eating his lunch, the table-cloth is an opened newspaper—an ancient *Morning Post;* the luncheon consists of a sandwich, salt, bread, and water: a champagne glass, and a ginger-beer bottle filled with some liquid which he shakes lustily to impart to it an appearance of effervescence. The table is deal, the floor bare, the whole place desolate and comfortless; yet to see the man you would suppose him seated in a prince's chamber before a board purveyed with plenty. He is an elderly, aristocratic man, in a coat that might have been black-leaded, so worn to a shiny iron-grey is that garment; but the hand below the frayed sleeve is white as hand can be; over it a cuff he had himself washed out that morning, and dried in the sun before dressing for lunch. He is scrupulously exact in his toilet, scrupulously exact in his luncheon and dining hours, severally fixed at two and seven o'clock, the dinner consisting as a rule of a sausage and a potato. Before dinner he orders James to ring the bell and summon his guests: he is James, his guests are imaginary; the bell—an old dustman's bell he had bought for a few half-pence—hangs to a nail by a piece of string, and the clatter it makes when James rings for dinner, causes the old landlady to mutter a volley of threats against the poor cracked-brained lodger; for of course he is mad to the vulgar. One vulgar person never calls another vulgar person mad; it is always somebody better off, somebody disposed to be eccentric; to be called mad is a satisfaction generally, it is a testimony to the uncommon, and in most cases to the superior. This person, like

many another, regards it as a distinction, and will not in any case allow it to interfere with the imperturbable good temper which induces him to make the best of everything. In his cuffs gleam a pair of studs, the fair value of which may be one penny, yet he lightly pushes them into position, with the pleasant remark—"Must change these for diamonds to-morrow; the worst of gold is it gets in one's way so!" Another time he complains of the jingling noise they make against the plate (he is eating off a piece of paper with a pocket knife). Every now and then he will address the servant supposed to be standing behind his chair, possibly to censure the wine-merchant regarding the vintage of the champagne, holding up the ginger-beer bottle with evident displeasure, a truly humorous twinkle in his eye nevertheless. And while he and his guests are helped to the most luxurious fare procurable upon the Continent of Europe, there is no disgust on account of the frugality and destitution around him, which indeed he succeeds in losing sight of altogether beneath the illusion in which he, himself, enshrouds it.

This is Mr. Dickson Cheffinger; a gentleman in reduced circumstances, the presumptive heir to a baronetcy, and at this time without a friend in the world, save and except the clergyman from the imposing-looking church near by, who, with the affable tact peculiar to him, humours the craze of the poor gentleman, and never calls without leaving some delicate souvenir of his visit. And Mr. Dickson Cheffinger, who would have received a visit from Her Majesty as an honour, but quite as a matter of course, gives truly noble reception to this distinguished guest. James is despatched hither and thither, and frisks about regardless of dignity, in the endeavour to please his master and do justice to the importance of the visitor. All the aristocratic and noble ones staying in the house at the time are privately acquainted by James, directed by his master, of this addition to their number. The elaborately carved oak guest-chair in which King Charles was wont to sit (it had been a rush-bottomed kitchen-chair; but the rushes were now conspicuous by their absence), is placed before the gentleman with much ceremony and apology for the tarnished state of its

trappings. "It is an heir-loom," says Mr. Dickson Cheffinger, "and the nobility of England have sat therein for centuries!" Altogether, the Rev. Westley Garland's pastoral visit to Dickson Cheffinger, Esq., is about as painful as it is humorous, and as speculative as can be desired. The place is so dirty outside and in, and the gentleman's landlady so formidable, that nobody else ventures to enter; and although concealing the fact, Mr. Cheffinger looks longingly for these visits which are as glimpses of sunshine in his clouded life.

No one cared to think upon the subject, but had they done so, curiosity might have been aroused as to Mr. Cheffinger's mode of gaining a living; he was never seen to do any work, and never known to have any money. The house was occupied by very poor people, and Mr. Dickson Cheffinger was undoubtedly the poorest of them all; yet singularly enough he was invariably happy, busying himself from morning till night with the noble and illustrious guests supposed to be thronging his reception-rooms.

It was a harmless deception, and perhaps did good, for it drove away dull care, and banished the ever-present shadow of gaunt poverty. Sometimes Mr. Cheffinger went out, and upon these occasions he passed down the stairs, along the passage, and out at the door, without observing the disreputable condition of the floor and walls, or noticing the rude discourse right and left, often at his expense. Upon one occasion when a churl jostled roughly against him he corrected in so quietly polite a manner, the treatment was never repeated. True the coarse Sussex workman was not a little astonished at being addressed in this fashion—"Your Lordship would seem to forget the courtesy due to me, extends as far as the entrance hall!" and probably regarded the poor mad gentleman as entitled to be treated with civility if not with deference, for it was patent to all that he had seen better days, and that if he was mad it was misfortune had turned his brain, which Westley Garland was one to doubt. He had small faith in that *ignis fatuus* of a baronetcy which haunted the poor gentleman, or in the half-kind complainings against those who were keeping him out of his title, wealth, and honours; but he had implicit faith in

the antecedents of culture and inbred *bonhomie* which supported him under the various phases of his poverty. And Dickson Cheffinger was very grateful for this confidence, and would have served his friend in any way.

"It is no joke, Mr. Garland," he said one day, "for a man and a nobleman entitled to twenty thousand a year, to be placed in so questionable a position. The Duke of Cambridge was here to dinner last evening, and I candidly asked the opinion of His Royal Highness upon my claims, and if he could not introduce the subject to Her Majesty? He could not do that, he said; but had no doubt, giving me the benefit of his private advice, that upon the death of the present representative—quite an old man, my dear Mr. Garland—I should certainly acquire possession!"

"And so you will, my dear sir, all in good time,—these things are not to be hurried; the chief point is to be happy and contented in the state we immediately occupy."

Whereupon Mr. Cheffinger had seized his hand, exclaiming, "And I am, sir, supported by Providence. And my good friends—you wonder where they have run away to—dressing for lunch—as I live, it is time! James, ring the bell; a cold collation, Mr. Garland, but you will stop, sir, our friends will be so charmed to meet you?"

Mr. Garland had known trouble himself, and, although it had taken a different effect upon him, he could sympathize with the innocent eccentricity of this fellow-creature. He invariably preserved his gravity, was always tenderly considerate, and furnished the board with all above those common necessaries it ever contained. As often happens, Mr. Cheffinger's weakness was better, far better known, distant miles away, where perhaps it had more interest; the occupiers of the obscure little street and common lodging-house were content to leave it at peace, so many odd twistings of character come under the notice of the very poor.

One evening Mr. Garland walked in quietly and without ceremony, as was his custom: the poor gentleman was intently studying the only book he possessed—a torn and faded "Burke's Peerage."

"Good evening, Sir Dickson," said the Minister, with a frank and genial smile; "how are you?"

"Very well, thanking you much; indeed, I may say, never better! Cavendish was here this morning. 'Bless my soul,' said he, 'how well you're looking, Cheffinger; mean to outlive it, I can see!' 'Indeed I do, my dear Duke,' I replied, and he quaffed my health in champagne, there and then; (pointing to the ginger-beer bottle on the grimy mantel). Going down the stairs he knocked against the Duke of Richmond, 'Why, here's this fellow,' I heard him say, 'we all thought going quietly off, as lively as a fighting-cock!' Not elegant, Mr. Garland, but I distinctly heard it on the stairs."

"These Dukes know you are of an enduring sort, Mr. Cheffinger!"

The poor gentleman laid his hand with grave earnestness upon the other's arm, and said,—

"If you do not believe me to be *Sir* Dickson, why call me so? If you do believe it, why not keep to the title? None are here to gibe at the honour you concede by right!"

"Call not this man mad!" said Westley Garland to himself, adding aloud, "I come to make a proposal, which it may give you pleasure to accept, and do me service in return!"

The impoverished man was alert in an instant.

"If I could but serve you—do tell me how? Is it for the Church? My friends, I am convinced, will interest themselves—I expect the Bishop of Chichester here very shortly; do let me put the matter before him?—"

"Many thanks, no! Nothing in that way! I will explain. You told me once you knew Devon—I think you said yours was a Devonshire family?"

"It is true, dear old Devon! Somebody from Torquay was here last evening, but I forget who—I know I recognized the features!"

"I was going to ask if you remember an estate that was known, before its sale to the present proprietors, and may be now, for all I know, as Eagle Hall?—"

"By name and sight well. Let me see,—who the dickens lived at the Hall? Lord—Lord—who?"

"Mr. Lionel Travers—he was my College friend, he met with serious reverses and great misfortune. I was desirous of befriending his family, but was prevented; and upon instituting inquiries I ascertained they had mysteriously disappeared from the neighbourhood. I fear they are wandering, and in trouble. Do—you—think—with—a—well-furnished —purse— you — could—discover—their—whereabouts,—and —without informing them from whence comes the relief—so —help — them—as—to— place — mother and—and child— beyond the reach of—of want? Can you do this, Sir Dickson? If you will, I will spare no exertion to see *you* placed in possession of your own!"

Thin and white, hungry and exhausted, yet with a spirit debonnair and fresh as untarnished silver, the poor gentleman started to his feet, thrilled by chivalry and gratitude, and fired with enthusiasm.

"Without any reward I would seek them out for you, sir, and I will find them, I will find them! James shall pack my portmanteau instantly. I will leave a note, informing the Earl I am unable to keep an engagement; but he may come before I leave! How happy I feel that you are placing it in my power to do you some little service! I've a lot of people staying in the house; surely they won't delay me in any way; they did speak of the South Devon Hunt only last evening. I have it—I'll not tell them I'm going; the Earl, for instance, is an awful chatterbox—I have a decided impression he is. I'll not say a word to him, and by the spotless ermine, I hear his footstep on the stair. I thought he'd come!"

True enough a heavy and aristocratic step was heard slowly ascending, and, thinking it might be the landlord, Mr. Garland thrust a well-filled purse upon his ambassador (who concealed it in the breast-pocket of his coat, a dress-coat by the way), and prepared to depart. After taking a cordial leave, he was throwing open the door, when the Earl stepped into the room, in the form and person of that startling genius Mr. Noel Barnard. The Minister flushed to the temples, staggered for the instant, then coldly continued his way; the Secretary watching to the last receding glimpse of his form,

with that strange expression ever characterizing his heed of Westley Garland. One would have thought these two held some terrible secret in common.

Apparently the new visitor did not prepossess Mr. Cheffinger, who looked him hard in the face and asked,—

"Are you a doctor?" Somebody had once promised to send a Doctor of Lunacy to Mr. Cheffinger, by way of threat, and he had never forgotten it; one countenance more objectionable than another, one form more burly, and it was immediately identified with that doctor.

"No!" replied the visitor, "I'm not, and I shouldn't like to be! I'm a solicitor, Sir Dickson, and I've the pleasure of speaking to my client, whom I hope soon to be able to introduce to the world *in propria persona*. Shake hands, Sir Dickson!"

Sir Dickson shook hands, looking very bewildered, and asking,—

"Is there, then, any fresh news—any compromise proposed—any—any death?"

"Calm yourself, Sir Dickson, nothing is yet settled, we await a little assistance of your own. But tell me—the gentleman who has just gone out—I was not aware you were already suited with a legal adviser?"

"Bless me, no; the Lord Chancellor was saying he would recommend one to me—but I am not suited, I thought it premature, I thought it premature; but don't stand. James, take the gentleman's hat—where on earth's my man gone to? Allow me!" And with the gallantry of an earlier school, the poor man, James not being available, himself placed the hat upon a shelf.

Mr. Barnard watched the operation with much interest.

"You've a charming little room here, Sir Dickson!"

Sir Dickson did not know what to say, and spread the newspaper over the back of King Charles's chair for an antimacassar.

"Yet we all like a change," he continued, "and I doubt not, Sir Dickson, a little tour would be very agreeable. Like all gentlemen who possess taste,—you are fond of travel, eh?"

"I am, even now, contemplating a somewhat long journey, Mr.—Mr. ?—"

"Noel Barnard, sir, of the firm *Barnard and O'Connor, Chancery Chambers, Cursitor Street.*"

"And I believe my man must be packing; so sorry I cannot offer you a glass of claret!"

"Thank you, I never take it; but, to business! Grant me permission to lay a few facts before you relative to this long-disputed cause. You are, or believe yourself to be, entitled to the baronetcy, estates, and monies of CHEFFINGER, valued at some twenty thousand pounds per annum, in round numbers; the same being at this present enjoyed by your remote cousin, whom you hold to be an illegal representative; is this not so, Sir Dickson?"

"Precisely as I put it to His Highness the other evening."

The solicitor, to whom Highnesses were very small game, smiled graciously and continued,—

"I have been, for some time, actively engaged in investigating the case for you, and my respected partner and myself were in possession of some valuable documents effectually substantiating your claims, and which, upon completion, we contemplated having the pleasure of laying before you; but I regret to say these have mysteriously disappeared."

"Disappeared!" Starting to his feet, with clenched hands and a blank expression of countenance, Mr. Cheffinger slowly realized the effect that disappearance indicated; then he murmured something about a clue.

"Yes, we have a clue. A lad of unusual intelligence, recently articled to our firm, has decamped from a branch office, taking many valuable papers with him. His intention, no doubt, is to set forth in ostensible search for the heir-at-law, but he will sell his priceless freightage to the present occupier for a mere song. We desire to be beforehand and intercept the nefarious transaction; this boy should be tracked, and compelled to hand over the papers to yourself or to us. Are you content, all expenses being paid, to follow in pursuit of this lad, and to telegraph our firm the instant you discover him? You understand, we might place this

matter in the hands of the police; but it involves so much explanation and publicity,—all of which would be fatal to our cause, and might be prejudicial to your interests. We prefer availing ourselves of your services, if you are willing to interest yourself. Of course, Sir Dickson," added the solicitor carelessly, "it is immaterial to the firm, as we can very readily obtain professional assistance, and it is quite unusual for a legal representative to repose this confidence in a client; admitting him, as it were, my dear Sir Dickson, behind the scenes,—taking him, in fact, into a quiet partnership!" And the solicitor's face appeared so illumined by frank and hearty honesty, poor Sir Dickson, scarcely knowing whether he was upon his head or his heels, consented at once, and received a second purse of gold without knowing what to do with either. The sacred and fine old English rights of hospitality triumphed, and he proposed with great self-possession when his visitor rose to depart,—

"May I beg you will remain and share some slight refreshment? I am alone this evening, and shall feel honoured by your company."

"Thank you, Sir Dickson, I have so much business in hand, or I would gladly accept your invitation. I have to be in half a dozen different places, at as many different points of the compass, between this and midnight. And now, adieu; my best wishes accompany you upon this mission of delicacy,—a mission I am sure no person could execute with more tact and prudence than yourself. By the way,—I had almost forgotten, and the firm looks to me for all responsible work,—it becomes necessary in an exceptional matter of this kind, for you to sign an agreement conferring certain powers upon the legal representatives; without which, in fact, they can perform no satisfactory work. This is simply a form. You will sign this, of course, Sir Dickson?"

Saying which, the diplomatist unfolded a lengthy document and spread it upon the table. The poor suitor scarcely looked at it; he would have thought it dishonour to doubt so honest-spoken a gentleman. With a hand that trembled slightly with agitation,—the poor wasted form being anything but

strong,—he took up an old greasy pen, fumbled about for a half-dry penny bottle of ink, and prepared to sign; when Mr. Noel Barnard interposed in a gently business-like manner,—

"One moment! We must have a witness or two."

"My friends, Lords—"

The solicitor interrupted him a little impatiently,—

"Some one in the house!—"

"They are in the house, in the billiard-room. James will summon them to this conference."

Mr. Noel Barnard was turning very red in the face, when a knock at the door startled them. It was followed by the re-entrance of the Rev. Westley Garland, who explained that he had forgotten one of his gloves, and, stooping down by the table at the foot of the exposed document, picked up the said glove with polite assurance.

"Here," said the man they thought mad, laying his thin hand reverently upon the clergyman's arm, "Here is the best witness we can have!"

And the Minister nodded coolly, yet withal pleasantly; but brought a hand down like a sledge-hammer when Noel Barnard attempted to remove the paper,—

"My turn now, Mr. Secretary Barnard!" He seized the paper, and looked it over with the cynical comment, "Very pretty, a nice arrangement for Cheffinger!" That gentleman being considerably astonished at the new part played by his friend, Mr. Garland remarked, "No one should execute a document without having it, previously, read over to him and explained." And the calm, sad eyes sought out those of Mephistopheles, who, not abashed, stood with one hand folded firm upon the table, erect and haughty as some ancient ruler of provinces, and looking back the glance with the composed defiance of conscious power.

"There is so much of this," said Mr. Garland wearily; "if you do not mind, I will take it home to study?"—addressed to Dickson Cheffinger, who of course assenting, the Minister leisurely folded it for consignment to his pocket. Then Noel Barnard angrily insisted upon objecting to the breach of courtesy involved, and the Minister turned upon him with decision.

"The document shall remain in my custody for the present, sir, and until Mr. Cheffinger thoroughly realizes its purport."

"Mr., he calls me Mr. again," murmured the subject of all this solicitude.

"And now, sir," continued Westley Garland, "having settled our business here, we may as well go, for I can see Mr. Cheffinger is fatigued."

Saying which, and shaking hands with the poor gentleman, he stood by the open door waiting for Mr. Barnard to pass.

"Good evening, Sir Dickson," said that tactician, with consummate homage, "Good evening, and rest assured, despite the treatment I have personally received, and the affront upon our firm, we shall not lose sight of your interests; in which, of course, you will give us your esteemed assistance." And with a meaning look and warm clasp of the hand, the gentleman with Australian and other testimonials passed out, bowing sweetly to Mr. Garland, who, following, saw him well away from the house and down the street.

Left alone, poor Dickson Cheffinger seated himself in the chair of King Charles, placed the two purses upon the table before him, and stared at them with blank bewilderment. Which to serve first? Not being selfish, he thought it well to serve his friend before himself. But then the stranger had addressed him as "Sir Dickson Cheffinger," and the title was very dear to him; and was not the gentleman striving in and for his (Cheffinger's) interests, and had he not waited so long, so very long, for this day? Then arose a yearning to see, once more, his native county. He should go straight to Devon to serve his friend, and step by step trace out those in whom he was so interested. Again, how discover the lad for the solicitor, without name or description? Surely these would be in the purse? He looked. Yes! A folded paper, with a full description in neatly written characters, and the name of *Walter Gordon*.

"My friends will wonder at my absence," said he, half sadly, looking round his bare home, and dreading the idea of turning out upon the wide waste men call the world. True he had money, but then he was so helpless compared

with those strong and resolute ones he saw abroad; and he would feel lonely without the Lords and Earls and Dukes, his constant companions and intimate associates; he must leave all these behind, but then it was to meet them all on happier ground—perhaps at CHEFFINGER, the dream of forty years! A fair smile played away the wrinkled care-lines; he stood up a boy again, and more man than for a long decade.

"James," called Mr. Cheffinger to that nonentity his valet, "begin to pack; we start to-morrow morning early."

Then James, in the person of Mr. Dickson Cheffinger, began to pack. It was not a long operation. A brass stud —upon which Mr. Cheffinger gazed musingly—"It is not as handsome as it used to be, but when and where I dropped the diamonds is more than I can unriddle!" A pair of paper cuffs, a collar, a pair of carpet slippers, from which the pattern had long since vanished, and the faded "Peerage."

Having packed, he proceeded to settle some outstanding accounts, which early that morning had been a sore burden to the impoverished lodger. He felt very rich and very honoured now, and he stole down to the shore, to the calm grey line of sea, with its border of golden cloud to the west; and standing upon half a life and half a world, sought to trace the issue of his quest upon the fleeting light and deepening shadow.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

"How peaceful!" murmured Lena.

"It is peace before conflict."

Mrs. Brandon had stolen upon her unobserved, Lena looked up quickly; she had been lost in one of those reveries in which she, at times, indulged.

"I mean that we shall have a storm—do you not feel it, do you not see it?"

"Neither! Whatever will the yacht do?"

"They will not fear," said Mrs. Brandon, "the Yorkshire fishermen are familiar with these waters, and the coast, though dangerous, is well known."

"It seems so sad that storm should follow upon calm—"

"The principle is invariably balanced by calm following upon storm."

"Yes, but what wreck and loss may happen during the interval of storm!"

"True, yet life is thus ordained. Take, for instance, a young girl who has lived for years contented and happy with those constituting the circle of her childhood's home: the day comes when she is dissatisfied with this, and longs for what every female heart hungers for—some one to love and to love her; then sets in the time of disquiet and unrest, which you may call the storm-time if you like, and this continues until the time of discovering and discovery, when she first finds one whom she feels capable of loving, and whom she fondly deems capable of loving her. Around this same her fancy should wreathe beauty, her tenderness weave ideality; of her imagery

she should create a hero, upon her hero bestow nobility, court of that nobility its utmost sympathy, yield to that sympathy her fullest, freshest reserve of love."

While the woman thus insinuatingly ingrafted the pain of St. Aubyn, the owner of the yacht had laid aside his cigar and book; and, rising from a comfortable-looking chair, he pointed his glass for a leisurely inspection of the citadel. He saw a tiny hand trifling with the blue bloom fringing the cliff, and above this the most lovable of little faces conceivable.

"But then she may have freckles, come to get close," muttered the philosophic yachtsman, adapting a clearer focus, "sure to have freckles, always roaming about that garden."

"Oh, Mrs. Brandon, I can see him now; isn't he just like Byron's Corsair?"

Mrs. Brandon had been out of sight, she leaned a little forward, remarking,—

"He seems a handsome young man, upon my word!"

"The devil!" muttered the yachtsman, catching a glimpse of the black and white duenna. Lena did not trouble herself to alter her indolent position, she was fond of watching these craft by sunset; it was a picture that not alone relieved the monotony of the expanse, but fed those dreamy reveries, her sometime pleasure, not yet a pain. And the companion, taking advantage of her opportunity, resumed her tuition,—

"Unless the person you may be talking with experiences the same feeling, you cannot describe this first budding of love in the bosom of girlhood; but, my dearest Lena, if you were allowed to mix more in the world and come in contact with people, you would quickly understand for yourself, and from that moment a new era in your history would commence. In the great world of Society your beauty would gain for you a hundred suitors, old and young would incline to catch the favour of your smile, titles and honours would be playthings for your sport at will, hours would be but as winged minutes, golden dreams of perfume, music, and song; all your life

would be changed, your whole soul be thrilled, because you would love, *you would love!*"

Dulcet, as the serpent of Eden, the voice of the speaker and the spell of her words exercised a fascinating influence. The girl listened, overcome in spite of herself, and, suddenly starting up, stood before the woman, erect, panting, flushed with pride and pleasure, and holding a hand forth in the direction of that solitary figure the sun was painting glorious as some Homeric creation, she cried,—

"I love—love him!"

"I thought you did, my dear!" quietly remarked the black and white, plucking a root of grass apart, blade by blade; and looking with motherly interest for the first time upon the innocent being she was thus treacherously making wise.

The yacht was much closer to the shore, and William Arden could be distinguished more plainly than before, and he in turn could define the cliff and its occupant with tempting accuracy—risking the freckles. When he saw the action described, his imagination at once interpreted it in his own favour, and he accepted the sign as an invitation. This lovely and unfortunate girl was unhappy, most miserable, unutterably wretched, imprisoned upon this huge beetling crag in a castellated dwelling, by a stern parent of the Richardson's Show order of the parental, and she plainly appealed to him for deliverance! All the Knights of the Red Cross, with Don Quixote and the Champions thrown in, should not surpass his efforts of valour in her behalf.

"I don't want to get myself into a mess, and I ought to be in London by the end of term. Being friends of my father's makes it awkward too; but a fellow can't go and leave a girl languishing like that! I'm rather afraid of the old woman; if I only had her on my side now!"

As though in answer to his wish there was seen this—the younger lady was walking, slowly, away towards the house, while the elder waved a pocket handkerchief in the direction of himself; and by this he knew her to be upon his side. So, turning to his faithful purser, he gave orders,—

"Brown, open me a bottle of champagne!"

He thought he deserved a little stimulant before he decided upon his plan of action.

"Wind's rising, Mr. William!" and with weather-wise cautiousness Brown indicated an extra rippling of the water, a keener cutting of the billows. "Better put out to sea, I think. These rocks are as jagged and uneven as a shark's teeth!"

"No, no, Brown, I've set my mind upon anchoring here for the night, and the night it shall be; so quaff a goblet, old man, to—well, to success!"

But staunch Yorkshire Brown shook his head and would have none of it. If they both got muddled, where might their boat be in the morning? So the weather-beaten old fisherman contented himself with refilling his pipe.

It was while engaged upon this necessary office, an anxious glance bent upon the ominous line of rocks, the old man suddenly pocketed his pipe, and, pointing to an irregular ledge traversing the face of the wall like a rift seam, he muttered, "That's it agen; I can see it moving, and this time I could swear to it. That's a man, he is crawling along the ledge, and the water is rising upon him!"

"Well, Brown, you know what to do?" said William Arden, sitting down in his easy chair, and taking off a pair of exquisitely worked slippers. And while his skipper was preparing for running their little vessel nearer in shore, with many a shake of the head at the untoward and untimely nature of the act, William Arden removed his jacket, ready if need be to breast the surf for the saving of that fellow-being's life: but leisurely sitting down again to his cigar, until such time as his services might be required; and with all his thought intent upon the lovely child of the cliff. Taking up his violin, his invariable *compagnon de voyage*, he indulged in one of those sweet and plaintive serenades of Gascony, which but for its faultless rendering would, under the circumstances, have appeared grotesque. The ladies heard the melody, and returned to the edge of the rock, and there the elder, bending over, with a nerve characteristic of the woman, discovered

that solitary figure clinging to the ledge, and understood at a glance their scheme of rescue. Then with a smile of satisfaction she gave her arm to the girl,—

"Come, my dear, let us go in; it is getting damp, and you know how particular your Papa is!"

CHAPTER XXII.

"LAUREL IS GREEN FOR A SEASON."

In turning her back upon the roseate picture, Lena seemed to have lost all the spirit and vivacity that up to that time had distinguished her treatment of the companion. She walked in the direction of the house, past shadowy shrubs and clumped masses of light and shade, her face pale and thoughtful. She seemed to have suddenly crossed the border-line dividing the delicate periods of girlhood and maidenhood.

They went into the same room, and by Lena's whispered wish the lady did not ring for lights. They sat upon low couches by the window, Lena watching the one star in sight, and, as it became brighter, the shadows deepening below.

"I thought we would talk a little while, dear!" Lena was like some fluttering and tremulous bird now, and her gentleness had something imploring and supplicating about it. The woman noticed this, but she was not touched; her face bore an expression of grim content.

When upon the cliff, in the sunset, the girl's heart had throbbed as with fire, and her blood burned fiercely; her eye-lids had seemed overweighted with flowers of the crimson hour, and the sudden thrill of that new-found excitement mounted to her temples, crept about the white throat, and nestled there like an adder of red-hot gold. But now she felt cold and frightened, wishing, yet unable to root out these new, strange thoughts; yearning for some confidence and counsel. And only this sardonic woman, her worst foe, to talk to. Truly might the wind moan in the trees, and the blue arch above look sombre, for it is the most heinous spectacle

earth ever witnesses, where a designing and crafty woman undertakes the spoiling of an ingenuous, innocent girl.

"Yes, we will talk a little while, my child." Mrs. Brandon placed her arm around the slim form beside her. She understood very well it was herself to talk; yes, she would talk.

"Lena, you are by this time quite old enough to know what the world is made of, to know that there is evil as well as good. Your Papa would never acquaint you with all that it is necessary you should know, because it is to his interest to keep you in ignorance of very much that is going on in this world, of which you know, comparatively, nothing. You have to learn that men and women are not children in a nursery, that beauty is valuable, that a girl possessed of your, altogether exceptional, beauty has no right to be confined as you are. You must withdraw yourself firmly from this thraldom, and demand your liberty; only, of course, do not allude to my disinterested sympathy: for if I found myself in any difficulty through helping and advising you, I could not, conscientiously, befriend you again; as I consider I am now doing. Your Papa is injuring both you and himself by thus secluding you from all society save that of old Mr. Arden, the clergyman. Why, what would you be fit for, should anything happen to Mr. St. Aubyn? You could not manage his property and estates, utterly devoid of experience. You could not go forth into the world, because it would be as a labyrinth enveloped in mystery! You could not face the other sex, or ours! And suppose nothing ever did happen to Mr. St. Aubyn, of what use is it cooping and caging you up here all your life? Does your Papa suppose—is he so selfish as to suppose—you will remain like this all your life; that you will never experience a yearning for freedom, and desire for other company than his own? You have yet to live out the grand passion, and after that, if you can remain content with your present home, my name is not Hortense Brandon. You have to drink of that intoxicating draught which woman spends one part of her life looking forward to, and the other part in looking back upon—that blissful time when she feels that one at least in the world is her slave; that there is one will imperil life for her, bend to

her exacting will, fathom her unspoken wish; one whose happiness depends upon her treatment, who will lay at her feet honours and wealth, who lives but by her consent! Ah! my child, you are ignorant of the rapture attending such dominion, when a true heart is yours to wear at your watch-chain, to play with, to sport in company, to tease and to torment, to cajole or disdain at pleasure; and, when you are tired, to throw away, or *break;* if you are minded to know what it is made of—"

"I shouldn't want to know what it was made of, so long as I knew it to be all my own."

"Ah, very pretty; now I like you for that answer; you are again my own wise little woman, all good sense and judgment, and you quite agree with all that I have been saying to you?"

"I listen—to agree comes afterwards."

"And in that careful speech I trace your thoughts, my child; such things need weighing well. But remember, your books will not impart a knowledge of the world: believe me, you must mix with society for true wisdom, and go to your books for dreams; you may often glean more from half an hour's conversation than a whole volume will impart; and discover finer language in an eye than all the eloquence of your poets can put into print."

Lena sat with clasped hands, thinking intently; her eyes fixed upon the bright star that played hide-and-seek with the clouds flitting restlessly across the sky, and she felt altogether unhappy. Every word the cunning Mentor had spoken, and the subtle significance of tone, more stealthy even than the words, had sunk deeply into her heart. And it was of St. Aubyn that heart was full, for the girl was far from being wholly selfish. It would take many such lessons of the type delivered that evening, before she voluntarily wounded that tender and loving being.

"I could never be happy again if I left Papa."

"I do not doubt that he has taken care to implant that precious notion above all others; but what if Papa should leave his Lena?"

"Such a thing could never happen, Mrs. Brandon! Were it to, I should feel it my duty to remain patient until his return.'

All was silent in the room; without, upon the surface of the garden, the breeze freshened, stirring the flowers from sleeping, and rustling the leaves of the copper-coloured trees. Below, at base of the cliff, the waves broke with dull, uneasy, restless impatience, as though rebellious at being held in leash; and, when they smote upon the wall of rock and fell back cowered, rose again with redoubled fury. The wind scoured the garden paths with autumnal vindictiveness; some drops of rain fell, and the shadows marshalled their gloomy ranks with the magnificent discipline of the war-time of the elements. The girl felt depressed; it was the reaction and the operation of atmospheric change upon her sensitively organized frame.

"I will go in and say good-night to Papa, and be off to bed, Mrs. Brandon; for my head aches."

"It is very oppressive!" Mrs. Brandon rose to close the window; a swift gleam of lightning played upon the pale woman without her shrinking; nay, she smiled to it cheerfully; a roll of thunder with its terrific echo rattled upon the cliff, and seemed to rend it to its base.

Shrinkingly, Lena hid herself within the thick folds of the window curtain, until the reverberation ceased.

"I thought we should have it!" and the companion pulled the hearth-rug over the fire-irons, and leisurely rolled some plain needlework round her knitting-pins.

"Good night, my love;" opening the door for Lena, "I will send Mary to you, and let her bring that white dress to my room; I will run the edging in as I promised. Good night."

Outside they were somewhat surprised to discover Martha Saxe, the cook and housekeeper. She was standing very close to the door, and at once explained, while dropping a courtesy, that she did not know the ladies were there, and was coming in to close the window, because of the rain.

Hortense Brandon's eyes rested upon the woman; she felt that every word she had spoken had been overheard. Enemies to the death these two, they understood each other; but a marked difference existed in their regard for St. Aubyn's daughter,

"Going to bed, Papa!"—PAGE 183.

whom Martha loved with the dumb heroic faithfulness of a bygone age.

The pale lady passed silently up the stairs, the trail of her black silk robe, sinuous, ebon sheen, seeming to coil after her like a retinue of jetty snakes.

Lena was near the first door of St. Aubyn's sanctum; Martha Saxe, who had followed, laid a hand hard and big, but honest, upon the girl's.

"Dear Miss Lena, be careful with *her;* I'm sure she means you harm. Don't let her guide you in any one thing. Go only by what your Papa says, and never do anything without first asking his advice. Forgive this, it is for your sake; I mean well."

"Mrs. Saxe!" called the clear ringing voice of the pale lady, while leaning over the balusters above, "May I trouble you to kindly ask Mary, to be good enough to come to me a moment?"

"I hate her carnying ways," grumbled Martha Saxe, bustling off to comply, while Lena knocked lightly at the student's door.

"Come in, ladybird!" And as she entered, he closed his book, and the proud face, set with thought, relaxed to its accustomed charming smile when with her.

"Going to bed, Papa!" And she stood before him in that pretty attitude little girls assume when they propose something they fear may be questioned.

"So soon! Afraid of the lightning, darling?" He never liked her to retire before himself; it was the day's reward, his one choice *bonne-bouche,* that hour before bed-time. They had had storms in plenty, summer after summer, winter after winter, but she had never wanted to go to bed before; on the contrary, she had flown to him nestling for protection, hiding her eyes upon his breast, his hands closed fast upon her ears. So he looked up with the quick apprehensiveness, the instant scrutiny of those who live in the delicacy of private, unguessed, and unfathomed peril. And he repeated,—

"So soon, Lena?"

"Yes, Papa," with a playful, pitiful, half-sad, half-tender, and altogether lovely pouting of the rosebud lips.

"What is the matter?"

"My head aches a little; but I feel wretched, Papa!" and then the whilom high-spirited girl burst into tears. Seriously uneasy, St. Aubyn drew her to him and wiped the tears away, and he felt that she was fluttering, and throbbing, and much agitated.

"Good gracious, Lena, my child, what is the matter? I never saw you like this before."

"Please, Papa, I never was like it before."

"What is it, dear?"

"Oh! Papa, I'm in love at last! And I don't like it, because it makes me unhappy, wanting to love you, and you alone."

St. Aubyn was taken aback by the *naïve* confession; then his face darkened while he breathlessly asked,—

"Do you fully understand the meaning of what you tell me, Lena?"

"Quite, Papa; are you very angry?"

Instead of replying he lowered the shade over his reading-lamp, so that his face was not betrayed; then he asked in a strangely cold and distinct tone of voice,—

"And who is the new poet my little girl is in love with—what hero in our picture-books?"

"No, not this time, Papa dear, it is *a real live one*, and I have been thinking of him by day and by night, and now I know this is called being in love."

More distinctly still he questioned the child, feeling the agony of wasted confidence, the grievous awakening from broken dreams.

"And how does my little girl know this?"

An appalling burst of thunder was the fitting accompaniment to her reply.

"Mrs. Brandon told me, Papa."

Even from that inner chamber the tumult of the billows was plainly, fearfully distinguishable.

"But how can this be your experience, my child; you have seen no one, have never left our house?"

"No, Papa, and she says I ought to see and know something of the world by this time."

Mr. St. Aubyn's countenance wore an absolutely shocked and horrified expression.

"Mrs. Brandon seems to have exceeded her duties. Had I considered you required enlightening upon such subjects, I would have acquainted you with all that was necessary for you to know."

Lena lifted up her hands in pretty dismay.

"I remember now, I was not to say a word about it to you, and yet Martha said, 'Always go by what your Papa says, and never do anything without first asking his advice.' Do you advise my loving somebody, Papa?"

It was of his own fault that she was so ignorant, so innocent, so confiding, so helpless; could he be angry with her, or feel otherwise than profoundly sad?

The corners of the room were all in deep shade, their sumptuous ornament hidden by gloom. Graven gold and bronzes, Sèvres, Dresden, and rare Continental fabric; Bow statuettes and Oriental vases, Chelsea and Worcester ware, delicate as dreams in sun-dawn; a gorgeous Buen Retiro, Louis XIV. ormolu work, a superb Della Robbia relief, antique carving, grotesque fancies from the Japan Palace at Dresden, and some choice old Wedgwood. Old Lac cabinets, buhl tables and exquisite pedestals, bonbonnières and bijouterie; miniature marbles from Italy and ivories from China, classical marqueterie, Venetian panelling, Cloisonné enamels, turquoise work of Angoulême, Byzantine chasing in dead gems, cameos, intaglios; Bactrian Tetradrachms, and carvings in jade and agate. Egyptian, Rhodian, and Moorish ware; Capo di Monte and Vienna, Persian and Turkish porcelain; silver torchères, and a wealth of costly trifles colourless in the deep shade, their sumptuous ornament hidden in the gloom, even as one's sacred hopes and dimly lovely longings may be shrouded and made dark, robbed of the light-lending charm that had rendered them so fair.

Rising from his seat at the table, he led her over to the easy chair in which she had usually found him, at this peaceful time, right along the ten years' happiness, and, seating himself, he drew her towards him, away from the

ottoman at his feet upon which she had endeavoured to sink, tenderly raising her to his knee with the words,—

"I have not much to say, my child, but I wish you to forget the past few years for a minute, and fancy yourself again the golden-haired darling who knew no greater joy or reward than coming to this chair for caresses."

He drew her head upon his breast, kissing her forehead reverently. She had been his lily girl, he could not bear to think of that throbbing heat which he was conscious crimsoned the snow-white brow as though dashed with the fierce glow of poppies.

"Many a time your head has thus leaned back to me, Lena; many a time have I passed my fingers through your curls in this way, and should I like your leaning thus to another, or another's hand to dally with these tresses? Ask yourself, my child. Golden flax to richer gold, and thence to golden brown, this fleece has changed during these ten years before my eyes with the splendour of a field of ripening grain, and is this to garland another's triumph? If it is the world you would see and learn as others do, and from which my chief happiness has been to preserve you, why you may learn its hollowness and mockery under my preserving care. But hear first what this same world did for me in days gone by. A darkened history I have kept from you, purposely—one of the histories, grim and tragic, arising out of the exactions of that pitiless Moloch —Society. I possessed the most beautiful wife it was possible for a gentleman of England to call his own, and for a time her whole love was mine. Society robbed me of both wife and child; just such another golden fairy as yourself. Yes, Lena, you are not my child! Deprived of those I loved with so exquisite and intense a passion, I found in you, one to supply the place of her I loved the most, my child; the other was too deep a wound ever to heal. That is the wreck this world you covet wrought in my home! Now, knowing all my love for you, and how it has been the one joy of all these years, you will not ask me to advise you to love another? I should have kept this secret from you for some time yet, but you have forced its disclosure; yet for your candour and

truth, painful as it is to me, I confess I am honestly grateful.'

The disclosure broke upon her with startling abruptness, very much as might have done one of the great thunder volleys without. But she did not draw herself away, or feel to love him less; it was only strange to realize, and truth to tell she felt a little lighter-hearted than when St. Aubyn began his gentle talking, for she feared reproach; but when it proved that fonder language, she felt nearly overcome by emotion. And now she just turned upon him with renewed love, for such it was, blended with sympathy, and, twining her arms about him, she assured those greedy ears of her unalterable love.

Suddenly they both heard a cry—a heart-rending appeal as of some one *in articulo mortis*, and the master of the house upon the cliff, starting to his feet, listened intently.

"It is the yachtsmen," he said; "they fear striking upon the rock; there is no preventing it: but it may be possible to render assistance afterwards."

He unbarred the window and looked forth. A great darkness was upon the face of the water, illumined by shifting gleams of lightning. Lena trembled, thinking of the yacht.

"We should help those poor men!" she said.

St. Aubyn looked narrowly into the clear and truthful eyes, and he read nothing there but the natural solicitude one would expect from a sensitive and excited child.

"Retire to your chamber, pretty one; leave Williams and myself to do the best that can be done."

The frightened girl obeyed. St. Aubyn hastily summoned his servant, and ordered that lights should be placed at every window, and a large fire lighted on the cliff within view of those upon the sea.

It was one of those breathless moments which seem laden with peril, when the delay of an instant may be attended with disaster, and when one can scarcely move for apprehension and excitement.

Amidst the bustle Lena could not forget those most interested; imaginary pictures of the endangered yachtsman in every possible and impossible attitude of peril and

dismay flashed before her with each lurid shaft of lightning, and culminated in a tableau of painful intensity at the moment a huge pillar of smoke, followed by a bright column of fire, rose from the beacon and lighted up the scene.

Like a castle in flames, the weird spectacle of some historic tragedy upon the border in the olden days, the mansion stood forth, every white stone reddened; whilst at the windows each waxen light blazed starry hope to those below.

It was another roseate picture, but not of the sunset; yet, somehow, fraught with more interest to her, her soul seeming to go forth with those flashes of light descending to the seething water, her heart seeming to leap with those bright tongues of flame; each gust of wind, fanning the fire, causing her to turn faint and pale. In the foreground the shadowy shrubs and clumped masses were like some barrier between her and the fire, all the surroundings grey, indistinct, and shapeless. The girl's heart, as once before that evening, throbbed, and her blood burned fiercely, mounted to her temples, crept about the white throat, and nestled there like an adder of red-hot gold, while her eyelids seemed overweighted with flowers of the crimson hour.

Meanwhile resignation prevailed upon the yacht, the canvas had been furled, and all precaution taken. Brown, the experienced seaman of fifty years, had declared nothing could save them, they would be dashed full upon the sharp ridge of rock looming out of the black water, a corner every fisherman had avoided long before Ashton St. Aubyn built him a house upon the summit; and then the old seaman had raised that shout heard by the inmates of the mansion. William Arden took the sudden catastrophe with the fine aplomb characteristic of his class, and was prepared to breast the waves and chance a scramble with cool decisive bravery; he only said,—

"If I go down, Brown, old fellow, give my love to my father. Tell him I should have taken high honours this term had I been spared."

He did not think of the beautiful girl who, like Lurline, had allured him to this peril; it was of his father he thought in

the hour of extremity. Even the delight of being broken to pieces at the foot of the rock she lived upon, did not strike this phlegmatic young man; he merely shrugged his shoulders, muttering, "Helen again!" and straightway forgot her; to think of more serious things, such as preserving his silver-topped meerschaum, the gift of a college friend; his sketches and materials, and a choice Didot, his favourite volume when he courted the *dolce far niente*.

Brown, with the Saturnine good humour of these rough amphibious philosophers, watched every violent upheaving of their frail cockle-shell with undisturbed serenity. Whether he was to be saved from the devouring element was a question of uncertainty, troubling him not at all; but whether his young master was to be preserved, became a more vital matter, and to effect this he would fight these fierce waters with all the energy left in his old limbs.

"Let me just put this round your body, girth-fashion, Mr. William, do now, sir! And I'll stay aboard with the end of it, until you're safely landed," pleaded the honest fellow tenderly, and as solicitously as though the young man had been his own son. It was a slim yet strong rope, the loop of which he had softened by means of a length of canvas. Touched by this regard, William took his hand and pressed it hastily, while kindly declining.

"No, old friend, I shall be better unimpeded, and must take my chance as any other; we will strike out both together, and God help us! But if I, only, escape, owing to my youth and strength, I will be a good friend to the wife and children; so don't let that trouble you, Brown."

"It doesn't, sir! I've commended 'em to Higher hands so many times afore, I safely leave 'em now."

At that moment a bright gleam flamed upon the cliff and shone upon the sea, and light after light appeared at those tiers of windows high above their heads, and it was like hope speaking out from the darkness of awful peril; it was like home awaiting tired tempest-beset travellers.

"They are expecting us, you see!" cried William Arden cheerfully. Even while the storm drowned the reply, and

the men's faces became fixed as though bared to eternity, the accelerated force of mighty billows, lashed to ungovernable fury, bore the vessel with a crash upon the rock, firm and cruel and white as a phalanx of steel. Only a miracle would have averted it, and they took their leap for life. A riven, splintered hulk fell back to the water, which tore in at the gap, victoriously rushing with frenzied glee over the dismantled citadel, surrendered to the raging foe.

The men battled bravely, blinded with spray, beaten with foam; struggled with the heaving water, mounting and rearing above the billows, fighting with the cowardly surge that soft as wool enveloped them, breasting the pitiless, cutting edges of wide waves mowing all before them, shaking rain and salt from their faces and closed eyelids, lifting arms like men, for mighty effort; and plunging forward with the strength of steeds in the thick of conflict for the hazardous, hopeless, misty rock, shelving ahead of them. A giant wave, an ebon mountainous mass that smote them, and bore them asunder, hurled them upon an opposing mass, one other tremendous wave, and they were swept, and rolled, and dashed helpless and insensible, upon a jagged and gnarled table, abutting from the ledge, of which mention has been made. And here they were laid and left as though the frantic waters, tired of their fury, were satisfied with the havoc they had wrought.

And now a strange thing happened.

Guided by the fitful gleams of lightning, a figure crept with difficulty towards the first of the victims. There was immediate danger of being blown from the narrow vantage ground, and this figure moved slowly and as though exhausted, for he too had been pressed close by this same storm, and his strength was far spent; but he believed it was in trying to save himself this trouble had come upon them. It was John Beech—not dead yet, and, even under these disadvantageous circumstances, devising in his rude fashion the downfall of that proud foe who had been all but successful in his method of settling an old account. Only let John Beech stand once again on terra firma, and give him time and opportunity, he promised himself sweet satisfaction! Altogether, from the

number of the hunters, our lion Noel should be netted ere the snow fall!

Kneeling as he had often knelt by some prostrate prize-fighter, or victim of some drunken brawl, John Beech raised young Arden's sea-drenched head, and, parting the matted curls, stared hard at the white face, while the lightning favoured the inspection; and then he felt, not for the heart, but for the gold repeater and the purse: he had no thought or intention of doing the young man the least injury, but for safety's sake removed these to his own keeping. All at once he became aware of something moving above, something coming down upon him, and for an instant the brute courage he possessed in plenty blenched and was shaken, for he imagined it to be a fragment of rock detached from the mass above. He put out his hand to save himself, and caught the object, which proved to be a basket suspended by a thick rope, which Williams and St. Aubyn had lowered for the wrecked. The basket contained a small flask of brandy, and this he drank off at once, then upon the strength of it commenced ascending by means of the rope; being of portly habit, the ascent was slow, but those above facilitated this by drawing in the rope, happily ignorant of its freightage. John Beech's cause was aided by the fact of the fire having burnt itself out, while the one lantern was of course useless in such weather. He was over the brink on the right side, almost before his preservers were conscious of his nearness to the summit; and, breaking away, he glided amongst the dark shrubs, the astonished Williams pausing from pursuit at a call from his master. Both were startled by this event, and St. Aubyn could not suppose it to have connexion with the yacht. Who then was this? However, it was not the time to indulge in speculation, and he gave orders for the lowering of the rope once more. While John Beech was scaling the palisade and making good his escape, the master and the faithful servitor were repeating their humane attempt, but without success; there was no response, no pulling at the rope, no sign of life from below; then Williams said,—

"I'm afraid they are insensible, sir, if they are not dead; but

by your leave I will fasten this end to a tree-trunk, and go down and see?"

"By all means."

The result of this was the arduous feat of mounting with the yachtsman, performed with safety, not mentioning a variety of knocks and bruises; and St. Aubyn had the young man conveyed to one of the sleeping apartments of the house, and, after getting him hastily into a bed, left the sufferer in the worthy hands of Martha Saxe, while returning to his work of mercy.

Martha had not been sitting by the bedside very long when there came a gentle knock upon the door, and outside stood Lena, of course urged on by Mrs. Brandon, standing back within the shadow. She had been unable to contain herself any longer, and, running to the companion's room, begged she would accompany her upon a quest of curiosity.

"Wait, my dear little girl, wait!" The pale lady quietly added, in her usual composed manner,—

"He will be brought here presently, when you will naturally feel anxious, and go to see how the unfortunate young man progresses!" Hence this ultimate visit to the chamber appropriated to his use; but here an unexpected obstacle opposed the inquiry in the person of Martha Saxe, who, rising from her chair with a determined expression, stood in the doorway, and would permit neither to pass.

"Excuse me, Miss Lena, and you also, ma'am, but *I* am in charge here, and can allow no one to enter at present."

"But, my good woman—" remonstrated Mrs. Brandon, "are you aware whom you are speaking to? A pretty mark of respect to our young lady, I must confess!"

"In my respect I yield to no one, ma'am; perhaps I have Miss Lena's interest as much at heart as yourself. Any way, this is no sight for her to look upon, and look upon it she shall not."

The attitude taken was so resolute, Mrs. Brandon at once withdrew; she depended upon finesse—the opportunity was not far distant.

"Come, my dear, it is always policy to avoid open rupture with the inferior order of beings."

Martha Saxe heard, as it was intended she should, and, reopening the door, she asked,—

"Pray do you call yourself a superior order of being, ma'am?"

"Yes, Mrs. Saxe, I do!" replied Hortense, with her most withering smile.

"Then, ma'am, I am utterly without ambition;" and, so saying, Honesty bustled back to her nursing. Towards dawn the patient became sensible to surrounding things, and to a kind hand smoothing his pillow.

"Where am I?" he asked feebly; "And Brown, is the old man safe? I can only remember taking to the waves!"

"You are in the house above the cliff, sir; my master and our man saved you from being blown or washed from the rock. You are to receive every attention, but not to leave this room, as my master is very particular, and never allows the privacy of this house to be disturbed. Since he has saved your life, I suppose you will scarcely do less than regard his wishes?"

"Certainly, my good soul, else I should make but poor return for his kindness. As soon as I am well enough I will take my departure, and with as much quietness as possible."

"Thank you, sir; I knew you were a gentleman!" and Martha Saxe crossed her hands over the white apron with complacent satisfaction. After that he fell into a gentle sleep, which greatly restored him. When he opened his eyes it was broad daylight. A tasteful chamber, flowers, sunshine, distant sound of music, and a girl's voice of an exquisite sweetness, formed a vivid contrast to the events of the night, and the new vigour gained by such refreshing rest so inspired him that he arose and dressed, finding his clothes all dried and folded by the bedside. His nurse, taking advantage of the calm sleep, had gone downstairs to her breakfast. The promise he had made to Martha went to pieces with other bubbles of those sleep-disturbing dreams; and the remembrance of his nurse went with them, it was all as a shadow of the night. He listened to the sound of the voice—it could be none other than the fair girl of the garden, and he would ascertain for

himself if her beauty confirmed the promise of his glass. Thus do accidents thwart the best of purposes.

He entered a chamber like a very bower, and there, framed in by blush-roses, shadowed by garlands, tinted by tender hues, with an incense of sweet perfume rising around her, sat the princess at a white and gold harp, upon which she evoked the soft strains of enchantment. Unaware of his entrance, she was gazing through the trellis of flowers at the cloudless sky beyond, singing a dainty carol, one of St. Aubyn's lessons of love. A simple morning gown of blue and white striped cambric, with one of her favourite roses below the throat, was the charming dress she wore; but its pretty childishness was in itself more becoming than all her robes of royalty, and to the tired and satiated eyes of this man of many cities, it seemed the very realization of his most poetic imagination. Mrs. Brandon had gone to her chamber for her accustomed half-hour's retirement after breakfast. It really seemed as though everything favoured this intrepid cavalier.

He was careful not to interrupt that sweet minstrelsy, but, seating himself with quiet composure at the table, he began turning over the leaves and pictures of a Book of Beauty, and although the illustrations were quite upon an average with the portraits in such productions, they looked positively haggard when compared with that bright young face amongst the roses.

When Lena arose upon the impulse she saw this cool and graceful stranger; so very much at home, even her spirit rose with antagonism. It was mortifying! An interesting invalid whom she believed half drowned, and who, according to her ethics of fiction, ought at this time to have been in a raging fever, uttering her name in broken interjections of his delirium, or something equally dreadful, which she could just peep in upon to hear; was, actually,—sitting at her own little table of Poetical Caskets, Garlands of Lyrics, and Books of Beauty, and that with the most perfect self-possession, as though she had played and sung for *his* pleasure; a man—and a stranger, when she was scarcely permitted to know of the existence of such beings. She felt in a rage, and yet too embarrassed to

give expression to her annoyance, so she just said nothing, standing there as though she, and not he, were the culprit, her cheeks rivalling the roses, her eyes, even in drooping, so full of language, no words were needed, leaning to her harp as for protection, looking anxiously at the door which she could not reach without passing him.

"If I hadn't wanted Mrs. Brandon," she thought, "she would have been meddling about here whether I liked it or no! I wish she would come in now."

But the stranger rose with a pleasing smile, with so disarming an assurance, she was incapable of preserving further resentment, and, lifting her head, permitted her eyes to dwell with a very interested and absorbed candour upon William Arden's face.

"Forgive my coming here—blame the alluring charm of your music. I came also to thank Mr. St. Aubyn for his kindness of last night. I owe my life to the efforts of himself and those who assisted him, and, being of a very grateful nature, I could not wait until some one came to me; I have brought my thanks to you. Say that you forgive me—say—bless my heart, I forgot to tell you my name—I am William Arden, son of Mr. Arden, the clergyman, your father's friend!"

"What!" cried Lena, with unaffected pleasure, "are you Willie?" She had so often heard the old pastor praise his boy as being everything that was good and chivalrous, courtly and cultured, she welcomed the acquaintance with cordial greeting; and surely when St. Aubyn knew who this was, even he would not feel angry? Had he not over and over again asked how Willie was? How Willie was getting on? Did Willie continue in Oxford, or Germany, or London, or Paris, as the case might be? It had been Willie this, and Willie that, until the name and the boy had been a sort of friend, and hence the girl, with the spontaneous, impetuous child-like warmth natural to her, held out her hand with—

"And you are Willie?"

"Yes," he answered with a frank smile, "I am Willie!" giving the hand a cordial shake, "and so glad to know you!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

FROM THE THRONE OF LIONS.

Lady Helen Darrell had remained at the Bedford, until Grunden had completely fitted up the mansion according to her ladyship's own exclusive taste: in a style surely, never before seen upon the earth. A curve, a line, an angle not in exact symmetry, not the most gorgeous of hues, not the very quintessence of barbarian taste, and the feature was objected to and must be removed, even though involving days of labour. Cleopatra was not more fastidiously sumptuous, or outrageously inelegant. That fossil chieftain the old Lord Darrell, who stood in wholesome awe of his haughty and overbearing daughter, and who could have contented himself with the humble lodge at the gates of one of his estates, viewed the surfeit of magnificence preparing for their habitation with a sort of stupor. To remonstrate with Lady Helen was, if not certain execution, the next thing to it, for it was the process of being slowly frozen to death. The glance of Lady Helen's eyes, if directed in indignation or scorn, was more scathing than the lightning; but the blighting and withering effect of Lady Helen's voice, when Lady Helen chose, defies similitude. All her life long, pride had been no name for the quality she pre-eminently possessed; but, after a certain disaster never mentioned by herself or father—a private catastrophe the well-bred forget as quickly as possible—Lady Helen's whole innate hauteur became consolidated to an intensity of bitterness, without any parallel, and without any precedent.

When Lady Helen condescended to allow herself to be

loved by a mortal—condescended to permit that mortal to wed her, it was in a cold and queenly style and after the fashion of a marble Juno. There was abundance of exquisite languor, an excess of polished graciousness, but never a shade of warmth beyond the rare splendour of her robing.

Men in Society, who dared to admire at a distance, called her the "Queen of Night." The decorations of sullen gold, the heavy flush of crimson, the dense velvet trappings—colour of huge purple grapes and amber, sensuous as the head-gear of an odalisque—lent effect to, but did not in any degree heighten, the arrogant beauty of this woman; whose attractiveness was of that order which keeps men at bay, and leaves women out of the world altogether. Her advent in Brighton naturally created an extraordinary sensation; rumour marshalled her approach, Society was apprized that the combination of Empress and Goddess, for which it had been waiting from the days of Helen of Troy downwards, was upon the eve of appearing in the stately person of Helen, Lady Darrell. Unfortunately she did not accompany Lord Darrell when he made his *entrée*, it being a fancy of her ladyship's to disappoint every one if possible and when not inconvenient to herself. Lord Darrell appeared alone, in a sumptuous chariot, upon the King's Road; and he was closely criticised, the curt estimate being that his lordship was decidedly foxy. The fact was—a natural fact, and one for which his lordship was in no way accountable—the prevailing colour of his external presentment was red. This nobleman had, indeed, a singularly dry and withered appearance, reminding one, not inaptly, of an autumn leaf. In or out of Society her ladyship ignored his lordship; he was quietly retained as one of the establishment, that was all. A wit, who by her icy hauteur had been aggrieved, once alluded to her ladyship as "that sphinx of the old red sandstone;" one of her army of maids heard of this, and, owing a grudge for dismissal, persuaded the being she kept company with to write it anonymously, and, his caligraphy being the reverse of ungentlemanly, her ladyship actually read the abominable epigram; and, never having experienced any astonishing

regard for this or any other member of the Darrell family, she from that moment took inveterate dislike to her geological progenitor. It did not materially affect his lordship, who, partly from inability and partly upon principle, made a point of never feeling, never seeing, and never knowing anything. He lived, indeed, a life of utter stagnation; he had been quietly dropped out of the world by his own and by other people, and he infinitely preferred to remain there. Possibly he learnt more without, than he had ever had an opportunity of learning within; be that as it may, however, it is an indisputable fact that he had been quenched, totally extinguished, for a period long anterior to the date commencing this narrative.

When, therefore, the select saw Lord Darrell, their apprehensions with regard to the approaching sovereign were comfortably removed. One can generally judge of a child by the data presented in its parent. But, with her state entry and progress of subjugation, Lady Darrell was not destined to enjoy all the sweets of victory; for that self-same day her ladyship returned to her splendid drawing-room the most wretched of women. A man had passed her side, the one man she permitted herself the condescension of hating, and him she did hate as only Lady Darrell could. That man, Noel Barnard, was the cause of all her misery! She had seen him mounted upon a superb steed, as usual, riding with the old grace she knew so well, looking as imposing, as conquering, as proud, and as unyielding as herself. She had met him once in India, she believed he was in India still, hoped with a devout hope Juggernaut or some other powerful engine had done for him; and here, upon the very day of her state entrance, she encountered the old enemy more imperious and autocratic than ever. "And this man," mused Lady Darrell, "what was he? What—was—he,—when—I—quitted—my—senses—and—positively loved him? Aye, and not with a passion like that my sex calls love! He was to me all that a hero is, and more than a lover is ever expected to be, even by the most exacting? Was he a Prince of the blood royal, or a tributary Potentate of enormous wealth and

most ancient lineage, descended of a dynasty dating with the stars; or some scion of the *noblesse* as honoured though not equal to my ancestors? I think not, and, if my memory serves me right, the person taught me drawing!" And, with ineffable disgust, the lady crouched for very shame amongst the velvet cushions of her carriage. She might have added—but, as we say, these ugly circumstances are resolutely forgotten—that this same man had also taught her to forsake the being whose name and home she had condescended to share; a name as honoured and noble as her own, and a grand old home approved even by her fine taste, abandoned in the hour of that sore weakness; and, more than these, and more than heart and soul had ever recovered, the lasting secret of her embittered life—her child. The illusion was quickly at an end, and, as a matter of course, Lady Helen returned to her parental home, resumed the old sway, then travelled; lived years in India, where English scandal fails to reach (so tradition treasures), and there saw him once more; returned to England, and in the famous southern town she encountered him again. And how did this affect her now? It was the problem vexing the proud lady throughout the remainder of the drive. Of course she was sufficiently human to feel mortified; although why she should experience prolonged annoyance at the occurrence was more than she could divine. There was nothing between them now; they were even as utter strangers. Had she returned to her husband, there might have been cause for dread; she had not —she was much too proud for that—and what was there now to fear?

"No, not *fear*," repeated Lady Helen to herself, "but to be displeased with!"

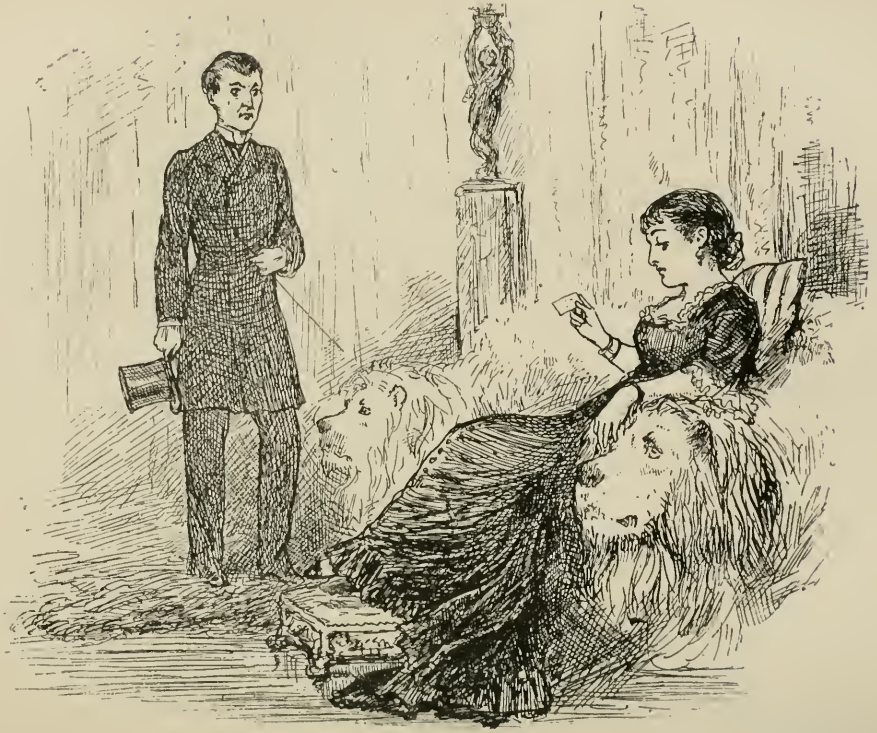
A morning or two afterwards the lady was seated in her drawing-room, a chamber draped with mulberry-coloured and rich amber velvet curtains: no looping or festooning, with disclosure of costly panels, or plates of pellucid mirrors, but the broad outspreading sweep of massive hangings, thick and weighty as looms could furnish. The autumn was coming, and Lady Darrell had no thought or intention of permitting

vagrant draughts to enter. The thick, velvet-like carpet was of no fantastic pattern; broad bands of amber, on a black ground;—her ladyship disdained the trickery of design. Give her severity of a mighty line, colour of the glorious orient. If people expected to see her drawing-room so elegantly furnished, she would disappoint them; would introduce the downright heathenish to this town of Sybarites! At intervals, huge skins of jungle beasts were spread upon the floor. By the black marble and gold mantel, where for warmth, a sofa might have been placed, was a singular construction formed from designs furnished by herself (Lady Darrell was a skilled proficient with the pencil); a long, low seat, the supports of which were the feet of lions, the arms and rests made of the half forms—far as the mane's extent—of lions, with all the grand breadth of head preserved; and the covering was also of the skins of these animals, luxuriously padded and stuffed, and overthrown with velvet, soft and odorous as toilet-satchets, deep purple velvet embroidered with gold. No couch could have been appointed more luxuriously.

Upon one point, only, perhaps, did Lady Helen agree with the mortal she had condescended to wed, and that was the love of this Eastern order of house-furnishing. It is probable their tastes were identical in this respect, and it is a circumstance to make note of.

The wood work in the apartment was scarce, and choice either for quaintness of carving, or pleasantness of odour. No tables, sideboards, or those convenient rests for trifles our civilization deems correct; but solid pedestals of marble, the yellow marbles of Syria, Siena, and Aragon, sculpt in resemblance of classic work, and the blue bardiglio of Carrara; having black basements chased with gold. Columns bearing Florentine statuettes, and handsome slabs from Numidia, upon which, Parian mythology. It was all a stern, defiant protest, and a challenge to opinion.

It was as though the softness and ease of her life had departed; and the roseate hues which seem to cover the life's dream of other women had faded from the horizon of her destiny.



"Lady Darrell glanced at the card."—PAGE 201.

Her private maid appeared, and—would my lady receive a gentleman wishing to see her?

Lady Darrell glanced at the card and inclined her head; she became thoughtful and sombre, not stirring, even when Mr. Barnard, at whom she scarcely looked, entered the room. She might, for all visible sign, have been chiselled from one of those Syrian blocks; she asked coldly,—

"What do you require with me, sir?"

"Permission to sit down. After that your quiet attention!"

She bowed very slightly, a cold, hard, haughty assent; it had little effect upon Noel Barnard, for whom the treatment came late in the day. He sat down; no one could be more quiet than her ladyship; and he opened his business abruptly.

"I told you once I never failed to pay old debts." She looked up at the sinister hissing tones; "Do you remember the miniature we quarrelled over, the girl I told you I had loved? I to whom all human emotions are strange; I who was spurned from her presence, and ignobly expelled her house!" He waited, livid at the memory, and she calmly said,—

"Do you think I can forget?"

"No. We are not of the forgetting class. I have only to tell you I have kept my word. Lionel Travers fled to a suicide's grave to escape dishonour; Ella Travers and her child are paupers, wandering the land!"

At mention of the word child, the proud woman seemed galvanized to sudden life and energy. Starting to her feet, standing erect with head thrown back, and hands tightly clasped together, she cried,—

"Where are *my* children, Noel Barnard? Alas! I am more ill-fated than Medea, wretch that I have been!"

"I would gladly tell you if it were in my power to do so; I can tell you of *our* child, but will not; I would tell you of *your* child, but cannot!"

"This mystery is brutal; do you think I have no mother's feeling?"

"Even wolves have occasional fits of tenderness; your ladyship will be true to the species. After abandoning one child and conveniently disregarding the other, through all the tender and helpless period of existence, you will probably feel enabled to live your day and play your hollow part in the drama of Society, unaffected by the history of those girls; one of whom, my daughter, is well provided for, and I will take good care continues to be."

"If she is with you let me see her, if only for five minutes? I will not disclose the truth!"

"She is not with me; even if she were, I would not grant your prayer. A woman like yourself forfeits the right to recognize her offspring!"

Lady Darrell sank down upon the couch with a low moan, lying there between the fierce, unpitying lions, and gasping forth her sole excuse.

"You know I placed *his* child with an honest woman, and paid her liberally, intending for my love's sake to see my child often; I could not tell I should be dealt treacherously with. But have you no suspicion of her whereabouts?"

"I may or may not have, but certainly shall not acquaint you whether or no! It was an idiot's trick, bringing her with you."

"You forget I loved my child; a creature like you can know nothing of parental love!"

Mr. Barnard shrugged his shoulders.

"Did I not, just now, impress you with my solicitude for our girl? But seriously you would never have brought the child away had it not been for the representations of Mrs. Vincent,—your friend."

"My false friend!"

"You may well say that; do you know why this fascinating woman became our go-between, conveyed letters to you, not to mention messages of her own; and painted me the angel I decidedly was not? I will tell you, and impart a lesson upon the choice of female friends."

"I never had a friend in my life!" cried Lady Helen angrily.

"More's the pity; I've had several, even I. Mrs. Vincent loved your husband, Lord Lindon."

"She?—The viper!"

"Reserve your enthusiasm until you meet her, and don't interrupt me again, for I am off to town by the express. Mrs. Vincent loved the Manor, Sleperton."

Lady Helen clenched her hand fast, holding by the mane of one of her lions, as to check the outburst upon her tongue. Relentless, coolly methodical, the narrator proceeded,—

"Mrs. Vincent loved her son, Lorry—"

"Whatever has this to do with it?" cried the lady, unable any longer to restrain her indignation at the matter disclosed, and the aggravating manner of the disclosure.

"This! Mrs. Vincent selected the Manor for a nice quiet home for Lorry; selected Lord Lindon for a nice quiet husband for herself. She relied upon a divorce."

"And you helped her?"

"Not at all; I liked his lordship too well. He is the only man I ever thought highly of; but—I liked you better, and I availed myself of Mrs. Vincent's assistance in transmitting letters to you. For any incidental and attendant lies it pleased that ingenious woman to throw in gratuitously I could not be responsible, could I? But be tolerant with her, for she is a thorough artist,—too much so, indeed, for me, or I should long ago have enrolled her in our corps."

"I do not wish to hear any conversation of this kind, sir; but reducing your vulgarism to practical significance, it is clear, I think, that this person, in whom I placed a certain amount of trust, is no better than a low conspirator."

"Very low, compared with the stately carriage of your ladyship."

She laughed a dry, rattling laugh, looking down upon the broad bands of amber, and seeming to measure back the years by these. "Yes; you had plenty of such phrases then. Strange they should have seemed so sweet to me! What fools some women are!"

"You are becoming positively cynical. Take care, or you will spoil the inherent sweetness of your nature."

Without heeding the sarcasm, she suddenly asked,—

"Do you know if Lord Lindon is in England?"

"Lord Lindon—is—dead."

The reply came so suddenly, without any forewarning, she was stricken speechless; so suddenly, she never questioned its truth; so emphatically, it fell like a death-blow. All unknown to any, scarcely admitted even to herself, she had treasured and lived on in the hope of a reconciliation. In her gentler moods, when, at rare intervals, the womanly and the tender took possession of her, and her whole being was suffused with a more human influence, she had dared to dwell on this, until tears would start,—the only time she could ever weep,—and something of a prayer—a crystal in the rock—would rise and frame to words, and the proud woman would plead for the restoration of her lost home and husband, and her child. And this had seldom been; her nature was too unyielding, and it seemed so utterly impossible. But to hear it all crushed in this cruel way, with a brevity so bitter; stayed the pulsation, and left her thrilled with a sudden horror. It was more than even her Arctic self-possession could endure; and, throwing her arms upon the tawny skins beside her, long, taper hands hanging listlessly down, wide bands of gold upon the white arms, she burst into a passionate flood of tears, bowing her proud face low, even to the lion chilling her by its cold, dead majesty.

Mr. Barnard raised his eye-glass, and inspected the appointments of the chamber with a curious expression: walked its length, and lifted the heavy fold of curtain, letting it fall with a muffled echoing dismally suggestive. With his finger-nails upon the marble he beat a refrain that set the mourning woman quivering again, then came up to her, and lightly touched her upon the shoulder, she shrinking back loathingly.

"Are we to be friends, or not?" he asked; and she looked up, her eyes red with weeping.

"I would not be friends with you," she said, rocking herself to and fro with excess of pain, and never thinking of the words thus spoken, "were there no other being upon the face of the earth,—as, indeed, there is not for me, now!"

"Oho! that's it, is it? Well, the contrariety of spirit is a study of itself; and as I devote my whole life to study, I am thankful for the opportunity I have had of enlarging my experience. But I came to propose something to you. The old place, Sleperton Manor House, is going to rack and ruin; you are still Lady Lindon in the eyes of the world, which knows little or nothing of the affair. Why not return to it? Live as secluded as you like, but by all means live there. You have just returned from a long residence in India; no better opportunity could serve. You have the legitimate right to take possession; do so, and one day you will admit yourself indebted for the suggestion. At the present time Mrs. Vincent has the run of the place; *you* surely have the most right to dwell beneath that roof!"

The words sank deep. She knew him too well to be deceived by the apparent fairness of his suggestion. Just so much as suited her she was content to agree with, leaving the rest to the strata of vulgarity she never recognized.

"Yes," she said, reviving wonderfully, "there is truth in what you say. I will return to Sleperton, I will resume possession!"

It was not often that Mr. Barnard permitted an expression of pleasure to light up his sardonic countenance; but the grim face now wore a positively cheerful aspect, not a whit more ingratiating, however, to the Lady Helen.

"It will be a pity, leaving this saffron bower; but most of your properties appear moveable, and you will have a more extended area for the display of this unique taste."

The door opened, and Lord Darrell walked quietly in, glided to a shadowy corner, where, behind a yellow pillar, he lapsed into the tawny hue of the skin upon which he had seated himself. Unspoken to and unspeaking, a ray of shrouded light stealing across the floor, he appeared, disappeared, and was no more. Now, what an interesting destiny must this be! One meets with odd characters in life, and eras of singular experience; but commend us to the old red sandstone period for something truly exciting!

"I shall remain in Brighton until the close of the season,"

remarked Lady Helen, noticing neither her father nor the visitor, and apparently addressing herself as though framing the course of future movements, "I shall only stay in town a fortnight in December, and re-open Sleperton Manor House with the New Year."

CHAPTER XXIV.

'WALTER GORDON'S' PILGRIMAGE.

THE grave charge brought by Mr. Barnard against his "articled pupil" was perfectly correct, that intelligent youth had made good his retreat. But the slight exaggeration of his having decamped with valuable papers was not correct. 'Walter Gordon' quitted the office of her whilom protector without so much as a scrap of paper or anything else. Contriving to cross the road unobserved, she snatched a hurried interview with Gabrielle, who, pressing upon 'Walter' her entire stock of ready money, and explaining the road leading to Hertfordshire, secured her safe escape from the house and street. Standing alone in the crowded streets of London, she realized again the terrible lot of the unprotected. To be unprotected is sufficient disaster, but when to this is added the ever-present fear of being tracked by some enemy, the desolateness becomes complete.

A waif upon the world! Anxious to obtain some means of livelihood by honest work, and discovering how very difficult it is, even, to secure this graceless concession on the part of fortune!

The words of Sir Charles Neville would ring in her ears, "Be sure and apply to me when you require a friend." She half wished she had really done so, but then came back the warning of that boy with the lovely face, of whom she was ever thinking; whose image had displaced the flitting picture of that exquisite who had first won her girlish fancy. Then more vividly than all was the vision of the fair and saint-like face of Gabrielle, looking so spiritual, so good, so tender; so like those ideal

conceptions of sweet martyr-women, the cherished dreams of Art. She took this with her upon the journey to an unknown life, clinging to the memory of that face as to an influence for good, placing it sacred in her breast and upon her heart, as the maidens of French pastorals place memory of the Virgin; and feeling the stronger for this, there being a sustaining power about the religion of a guiding, guardian angel.

She had no fixed plan beyond the march to Farmer Percival's in Hertfordshire; once there she would feel safe, and might, if all went well, remain until new strength was gained; and then, with money earned and saved, she would pursue her search for that loving parent, whom once recovered, she felt all her troubles would cease.

It was a bold scheme, but the abandoned and the destitute have, frequently, implanted within them a desperate and courageous resolution foreign to the natures of those better provided for.

This was the motive of that long and toilsome pilgrimage. Even while money sufficient to defray the cost of the journey was in her possession; she must expend for bare necessaries even more than she could willingly spare; but the residue should be placed aside for the purpose so dear to her. "But what if," argued the shadowy genius ever at the elbow of the unfortunate, to whisper a dread upon the most beloved of projects, "what if he is not in the land, what if his home is occupied by others, who after all this lapse of years love and are loved as you would have been?" "Well then," she thought, "I would crawl back to the old house at Sleperton, and would fall down before my mother's portrait, and die."

The broad thoroughfare she walked along—the Marylebone Road—crowded by well-dressed and happy-looking people, bent upon their business or their pleasure, served to distract her attention, yet the contrast with her forlorn state was too significant to admit of long abstraction. In order that she might not miss her way or be compelled to ask at frequent intervals, Gabrielle had directed her by broad unmistakable lines of road; and along the first of these she was pursuing her course, when, close by Gloucester Place, a crowd collected at the

corner suddenly divided, a man dashed from the hold of a policeman and tore off, quickly followed by the rabble. Her first experience of a London crowd was a rough one, but she instinctively saved the little stock of coin from loss. Continuing her way, a great church filled her mind with other thoughts. People were going in for evening prayer; the place looked so quiet and restful, so like a haven in the midst of tumultuous distraction, she was tempted to enter; and its lights and dim composing twilight had a soothing influence. Sitting very near to the door, and feeling sadly like a hypocrite in that boy's disguise, the lonely waif listened to and caught up the shreds of prayer and praise, of singing and of music; as eagerly and devotedly as though some bright spirit rapt in the ecstasy of worship. 'Walter's' life had not been a church-going life by any means; the yearning for higher things had been unable to expand itself; the undefined aspiration for some happier state, independent of her temporal condition, had been lost with those dreams which came and went, painting her weary life with the sole colours it received, and vanishing to leave it darker by the loss. Not for long might the child tarry; wide London was to be traversed before she could even commence the journey through the country. Fortunately Hertfordshire was at no great distance, nor was Farmer Percival's at any distant part of Hertfordshire. How she longed for the quiet life, resolved to work with a zest that should surprise herself—although what at, she could not tell. How she would love the kind ones who were to befriend her in these dark unsheltered days, how try, by all her strength, to repay their sympathy and help!

Lights were appearing in the streets when she left the church. The shops in the Euston Road gleamed with a more homely look. The outcasts welcome the gas-time; they walk with more freedom, and beneath grateful cover of that light can look their fellow-creatures in the face. Upon one side, as by contrast, and as though all life through there is a grey chill side to everything, the statuary yards, crowded with colourless stone, sent a nameless depression to the bravely struggling heart.

By the time she reached Euston Square it was almost dark. Trees wore a shrouded, comfortless look, and shrubs clustered together as though brooding in council. It was nothing, but she, somehow, thought of dull country ways at this hour when the land would indeed look desolate. These hurrying citizens and merry chattering little ones, these lines of lights and rushing of vehicles, all took away that sense of loneliness natural to one by oneself at shadow time. But these trees were dismal enough, and the child walked on more quickly to where the throng of people was greater, and the vehicles more numerous.

Slowly the walk up Pentonville was proceeded with; and because she was tired and faint, and could scarcely drag one step behind another, she, looking beyond to the summit of the higher ground, set the face that was to her saint-like and clear, at that point, and bore up bravely to it. More weak at every step, and thinking this a poor beginning, she tried to comfort and cheer herself by talking soothingly and with infinite compassion, as she had heard *her* talk; and so making her way onward, inch by inch, to that angle of big London where so many cross each other's destinies—the "Angel" corner at Islington. Here, with her wild half-gipsy fancy, she had made a niche for her guardian: struggling on with a sublime light in the great eyes, born of no flickering city lamp; she grew more faint from fatigue, and looking for, as it were almost expecting, the tender hand would clasp her own. So, on to the corner where the throng was greatest, looking wistfully in many faces, having placed *her* there. Then sight became dim and more dim, and she staggered back beside the glittering hostel, sinking to the pavement, at the very moment the one she had stationed there came breathless to her side; raising the pretty face, colourless and wan, and murmuring, "Thank God, in time!"

An influence for which none need account beyond the solicitude of her own kind heart had prompted Gabrielle to try and overtake her *protégée*. She could not, walking—and from delicate health, as she knew, walking slowly—have proceeded any great distance; and, thinking of a point of interception

this seemed the most likely to prove successful. Begging, then, the company of cousin George, who left his books reluctantly for what he feared would prove a wild-goose-chase, she had taken a cab to this very place, and waited there a good half-hour. Sore trial of patience this to the author, but he improved the shining hour in gathering honey for his cells, by taking mental notes of service for his work. And, as she felt would be the case, the sought-for had *not* passed, and *was* in piteous need of a sister hand.

You know how soon the crowd collects, be it horse, or girl, or boy, or what not? And here good George came in with magnificent effect, and Gabrielle said she had never seen him do a better deed in better time. Scattering the starers and lifting the child, he placed her in the cab, and then drove off, before the representative policeman had awakened to the knowledge that something was amiss. In Gabrielle's arms, head fallen back, face lifted to the lights they quickly passed, unconscious still, but eminently happy, the child looked so beautiful, that her friend could not help stooping to a loving kiss; then blushing, looked up, and caught George Percival's thoughtful eyes bent upon her.

"*Flowers and China,*" said Gabrielle, smiling, and gently placing her charge in a more comfortable position. Noticing that he wore a strangely absent manner, and an almost sad expression of countenance, she said,—

"You are lost in thought; I ought not to have taken you from the writing!"

"Yes, I was thinking—thinking, Gabrielle, I would much rather some other home could be found for this poor boy than with my father!"

Gabrielle looked up surprised.

"What! Still unreconciled to that? I thought you had given an implied consent?"

"Since you had written and made all preparation, before I knew of your design,—done, I admit, with the best of motives —I saw no use in prolonging the matter, and upsetting all your plans; but my annoyance was most sincere!"

"I should like to know the motive of this strong objection?

It cannot be that Uncle and Aunt will be put out in that large house, or that they will fail in kindest treatment, for no kinder ones exist! What is it, then?"

He pressed her hand with gratitude at the compliment to his beloved parents, but lapsed into silence when she taxed him with that question.

"Well, I *have* reasons, weighty reasons, Gabrielle; and some day I will tell you them, but for the present no matter; let things rest, and if he goes, he goes!"

Gabrielle pondered upon it much: usually so clear and open, he seemed keeping something from her, she was careful to think *seemed* because on no account would she have injured him even in thought. Her love was too sacred a sentiment for that: the love which exalts its object above all reproach, or the love would not exist.

"Does he seem strong enough to learn farming?" asked George. "More girl than boy, he looks as though the hard life on the land would shatter him to pieces!"

"Well, the fact is, George, we know nothing about farming. Your father has promised to find him occupation; he does not mention what."

"How much better it would have been to have found him employment in London. If you had asked me I would have made room for him as messenger at the Bank!"

"Do you not remember, George, I told you of his apprehensions lest some of those Circus people should find him, and compel his return to the business? He lives in mortal terror of this, for he suffered so much at it."

"Your protection of the child is romantic; what might I not have made of your just now kissing this handsome youth, were I so disposed, or adopted the school of writing which claims this sort of thing for its chief academy? Poor little fellow, I am sorry for the long walk before him, although I cannot recommend railway travelling alone while he is so weak."

Proceeding by way of the Upper Street as far as Highbury, the cab there turned suddenly upon the right hand. They were relieving her of the long preliminary to her journey. And when 'Walter' came to herself it was to find Gabrielle sewing

at her bedside, and Mr. Percival reading in a low tone from the evening paper; the scene being located in the comfortable guest-chamber of the last hotel of any importance upon the road to St. Alban's.

"There, there," said Gabrielle gently, "he is coming round nicely, and by to-morrow morning will be in better order for walking. We will instruct the landlady to have some fresh-laid eggs, new milk, and sweet home-made bread in readiness for his breakfast, so that he will not have to wait."

She knew the child was listening to every word, but said it thus not to trouble 'Walter' to talk. Lying there so patient and delicate-looking, with additional fairness from the surrounding of white dimity, Gabrielle felt almost unable to leave the child, but she must either do so, or inform George of the truth. As it was, she could see that her cousin from some reason or other appeared slightly agitated,—she could tell, as love tells, by small signs; notably by the nervous grasp of the paper, and that tremulous cadence at all times an indication of emotion; and, like sensitive and tender-hearted women generally, she took this reproachfully to herself.

Silently 'Walter' pressed her hand, given with so much innocent sympathy; pressed it to lips and bosom, seeming to cling thereto as for very life; looking up in her face with eyes overrunning with tears. It was an idyl of touching affection, none the less deep for being so quiet; and all this while cousin George, not to lose time, was assiduously reading the review of a recent novel, wherein hearts were tossed hither and thither in a manner the critic styled "unnaturally exaggerated," and which George, with his calmly viewing insight, pronounced overdrawn also. These men and critics, how they ignore the battledore and shuttle-cock of life, planted upon their impassible pedestals; until some day their own turn comes for play, and they prove just as overdrawn themselves.

He was still reading the review when Gabrielle, having taken a locket and fine chain from her neck, removed from it a miniature of George, leaving the other picture—an exquisitely correct likeness of herself; she clasped this about the child's neck, then stooping to a sweet farewell kiss, rose to go.

'Walter' turned her face away, and never moved while the two went quietly from the apartment, George believing the child was sleeping. Downstairs, Gabrielle made the proposed arrangements for the morrow, and paid the woman, who was an honest, homely soul, with motherly feelings; and Gabrielle with quick instinct knew that the child would be well cared for.

It was a clear starlight night, there was a considerable distance to walk before any conveyance by road or rail could be secured, but Gabrielle was not sorry, for starlight walks with George were very few and far between, and for the most part confined to the holidays. Each autumn they had spent the three weeks the manager was allotted for his annual rest, in Hertfordshire, and these were the only quiet delicious bits of green in her life; but this year, owing to the temporary indisposition of her mother, poor Gabrielle had been unable to accompany her companion of so many seasons. She never told a soul how bitter the disappointment was, but applied herself with redoubled energy to the nursing of the sick, not caring afterwards to go down alone, but looking forward to the year to come. Self-denial was so fine a constituent of her nature, and duty so beautiful a shading to the whole principle of her life, that even greater sacrifice than this would have been performed without a murmur. Few knew—and as usual those of the household least of all—the subtle goodness elevating this character. The poor, the unfortunate, the sorrowing, who never came to her house, and whom she discovered through the channel of no church, these blessed the woman with the angel face, as they described her, sometimes knowing no name by which to call her, nor any means on earth whereby to trace her. Silently she went into the wretched homes, as silently departed, yet ever doing a good work in the short time there; making up the quarrels poverty is so apt to engender, leading man and woman to think more kindly of each other, quieting noisy children, and making the sick-room pleasant as a bed of roses; placing food in foodless cupboards, and shoes on shoeless feet, sitting down to needlework while talking, and with her own hand making tea; yet no impossible creation, no heroine of a bloodless ideal, but a sensible, practical

girl, too old to command interest, doubtless, but a thoroughly worthy character for all that; as are many we pass over for the younger, more showy, and more fashionably dressed; and withal one who, if born to love, was born to suffer.

George was walking silently along looking up at the stars. They met few people, and these companions like themselves; engaged all day, probably, at the marts of commerce, and taking these quiet walks as most in accord with their ideas of contrast with the busy turmoil of the day, possibly as reminding them of earlier times before the youth and poetry had been ground out of them by stern necessity.

"What are you thinking of? This book seems to absorb more consideration than any preceding work."

"I wish it to be my master-piece. I think it will!"

"You are, naturally, stronger by every success, few have done more in so short a time; the story concluded with the midsummer part of the Magazine was decidedly your best work yet!"

"Do you think so? Re-reading it in print, it seems very poor!"

"But why?"

"I cannot tell, I only know it fails to satisfy me; perhaps because uninspired!"

"And the work you are engaged upon—"

"Is certainly more so! Or (correcting himself) realizes more closely my ideal of the beautiful!"

"If you are as precise in your judgment of George Percival's work as of other men's, it must realize a very high standard indeed to be truly artistic."

"There is a deeper aspiration than that, which is, to arrive at the truly natural!"

"And you are doing this?—"

"Yes—I am doing this, and how happily rare it is for the truly natural to be attended by unnatural pain!"

"Whatever do you mean?—That a work so perfectly realizing your conceptions gives you pain to write?"

"I fear it may cause pain in reading!"

"You were ever sensitive about your books—I should not like to be a writer, they seem to suffer so."

"And have equal capacity for enjoyment, arising from their finer sensibility, this being held in control by stern common sense. Once let a writer give way to weakness, and he is the worst of all poor fools, and suffers most."

"I never heard it put more plainly!"

"We are so used to glossing over error, and its consequence, pain!"

"You admit, then, the writer is as human as the rest of us?"

"I admit the writer to be ten times as human as any of you: by very necessity, and by inexorable laws of nature; else," asked he thoughtfully of himself, "how should we be the weaklings we often are?" He was evidently thinking of something foreign to their conversation. Gabrielle walked on musingly, then asked; to turn the current of his thoughts,—

"It would be worth knowing your exclusive opinion upon the true art of writing."

"That is soon defined! It should possess strong originality, vivacity, refinement of diction, and sensitive perception of character: the writer should be careful, never hasty, always natural, and should digest his subject ten years before imparting his views. He should avoid florid language and extravagance: say much in a few words as explicitly yet eloquently as possible, and bearing in mind the mixed company that goes to make up a public audience. He should avoid both mannerism and imitation—a bad style of one's own being better than a good style copied; imitation after all, reduced to its level, being little above plagiarism. His descriptive passages should be easy, without straining after undue effect, and without losing the opportunity of improving a situation by detail. His characters should be distinct, and well studied, and the ten years' system will also work advantageously in this. Not a character in my new book but has been in my mind's eye, preparing for translation for at least that term. Each character should be a type; pleasing or repulsive, always a type; not crowded upon the canvas if there is no room or need for it, but, should be drawn with the utmost care, painted in with power, and shaded off with delicacy. The roughest of

characters have their delicate shading, did we but look at them in the right light."

"And many a delicate character has its rough shading, I think!"

"You are still with the unfortunate boy at the inn!"

"I confess he came to mind with your words—but go on."

"I have almost given my views. I especially dislike veneering of morality and religion, and I believe the sensible reader holds all such tricks in proper contempt: in another sense, it is the custom with some writers to make free use of the Almighty's name, profanity which shocks and displeases all thoughtful persons. Politics should be abstained from, political sentiments being apt to give offence: personality also should never be indulged in, it being one of the most vulgar, even though the most classical, of all the tempers of authorship. Some writers display as much mock-modesty as others do profligacy, and both are alike detestable! I am calling none of these to account, dear Gabrielle—merely giving you a few of my ideas upon the art and accomplishment of writing. No grander symmetry of conception, taking ethical perfection to be based upon language, can exist than falls to the kingdom of the creator of fiction. The tender instincts which cause these records to gleam amidst dead ranks of literature, and to stand imperial in the whole history of letters, is that men's hearts beat responsively, and that therein the mirror is held up to nature!—"

"Not always."

"Thanks for the correction; no, not always, as my friend the reviewer pointed out in that capital article I read to you: you thought that a good notice, Gabrielle? Rather hard hitting, but directed for the writer's good, and, taken altogether, an excellent *critique!*

"I am ashamed to say I did not follow it as closely as I should have done!" and she was ashamed to say his own opinions were much more interesting to her.

"The truth is, music and effect aid and support the religion of authorship, much as they aid and support other religions;

the faith would die unless fed by the luxury of spectacle, of sound—half melodious, half lyrical, and perfume the sensuous message of the Unseen to the soul. In this I note the significant absence of comfort and solace, the bulwarks of the lasting, and a mysticism of unsatisfied and sensitive melancholy that appears to be supreme. I hold that the great end of writing is not thus reached. A page designed for broad-cast diffusion should do more than air the penchant or the taste of one. A book may be a magnificent myth—a pleasing delusive fable strung with even more than oriental elegance; but it practically fails as a work of true art, should no end be gained, and no purpose be held in view, from the first word to the last."

"And does my philosopher's new work fulfil this precise condition?—I, more mortal, ignorantly imagining the end of all fiction was gained by the amusement it afforded."

"Yes," said George Percival, with a shade of sadness underlying the tone of his reply, "it fulfils this condition."

"I am eager to read your new study—a study, I suppose, from the life?"

"From the life, Gabrielle."

"One or more of those imposing Directors of the London and Olympian?"

"No, Gabrielle, they are safe for this time at least."

"More interesting personages, doubtless?"

"More interesting to you and me, for they are—ourselves!"

They were interrupted by the approach of several caravans belonging to some travelling show, proceeding at a slow pace, and causing Gabrielle to ask him the meaning.

"Is there a fair?"

"Not that I know of; it looks more like the advance-carriages of some Circus."

She agreed with him. There was an unmistakable look about such vehicles even from the distance. As they came nearer, the surmise was found correct; evidently they contained the paraphernalia which could best be spared from the camping of some equestrian establishment. At the front of each carriage a lantern was hanging, swinging above the head of a sleepy driver, its glimmer shining fitfully

upon the dreary-looking gilt embellishments of these vans. Upon the sides the effect was more weird. Visible only by the starlight, they presented, where not wrappered over, a strange array of flying steeds, dimly-defined dragons, and other monsters native to the renowned legends of equestrian drama. Upon front and sides various characters of large and attractive form announced the design and connexion of this train of carriages; the notice thus acquainting the public that it was—

RINGDOM AND TANNER'S
GREAT UNITED CIRQUE AND HIPPODROME,
AND
COLOSSAL AMPHITHEATRE OF VARIETIES.

One by one the heavy, toiling waggons passed them upon their way; at the windows of the "living vans" a glimpse was obtained of the inmates, women and children; and the sight of a girl leaning her arms upon the ledge, looking forth watching the country, gave Gabrielle a thrill, for she thought of 'Walter.' Was the child safe? These people would pass the very house—might, nay very likely would, enter for refreshment—and, for all she knew, this was the company from which she had escaped; and that night, or early upon the morrow, the remaining members of the troupe and additional caravans would be upon the same road, so that nothing would be gained even if she returned; besides she could not so far trespass upon the good nature of her companion, who, although a cousin, was also a Bank Manager and an Author, a combination which she contemplated with considerable awe.

They stood upon a bridge over the river Lea, watching the lights beyond the meadows; stood hand in hand, as she had thought long ere this to stand with him, and that for ever; side by side, no other soul being by, and there was no sound save the little ripple of the water where it interlaced the reeds. It was such an opportunity for him to tell her that he loved her, all was so favourable, and it would have moved her with joy to hear the words so long waited for. He was looking down in the water, surely he was thinking what to say; his hand was trembling—yes, he was about to speak at last.

"Look, Gabrielle, there's a rat after that tadpole!"

She said quietly, not pettishly, "Poor little thing!" And she meant it; she was no more of the order of girl who shows impatience at a disappointment than was he of the order of man who snatches at every or any opportunity to tell any or every girl how much he loves her. A very prosaic couple indeed.

They went on again after that, beautifully calm and refreshed; the dew was falling, so it could not be otherwise.

But that night Gabrielle was awake long after he, tired with writing and full of thought, trod softly past her door.

"I shall be glad when he completes this new story; my darling has not been the same since he commenced it after returning from his holiday."

She could call him her darling there if nowhere else; might call him thus until somebody else's darling. But at that—pleased with a passing thought of his soon being the public's darling, soon being famed and wealthy—she fell to sleep, and dreaming, revisited that river-side, fancied herself upon the bridge, and was looking over, when, with a startled cry, she awoke. Then, when awake, the picture grew more real than the instant's glance which caused the cry had been; and she fancied she had beheld the figure of her cousin, stooping over the lovely form of a little girl he seemed to have in some way rescued, and the child was gazing up in his face with the most winning look she had ever seen.

"Oh, dear!" quoth Gabrielle, "this comes of my escapade. I could scarcely expect to do so much, and go so far, and dream none of it; but what a mixed affair my dream has made of it! Poor little one, I hope you are quietly sleeping now, and I hope you will find dear Aunt and Uncle Percival both well."

And how fidgety and sad a dream makes some people!

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER NIGHT COMES DAWN.

Half asleep and half awake, 'Walter' was suddenly aroused by a sound which set her quaking. There was no doubt of the meaning of that rumbling noise, becoming every minute more distinct. She had passed too sad and lengthy an apprenticeship to the night marches of these caravans not to recognize the warning echo; and the child trembled with horror, for what might not their coming portend?

In the extremity of her fear, she scarcely dared breathe, and with each heart-beat the line of waggons seemed a step nearer. She knew the habits of the fraternity too well to suppose they would go past without stopping, with no other hostelry, perhaps, for miles. No artillery was ever more dreaded by doomed villagers. It seemed prolonged to indefinite torture, because the progress was so slow. Her brow was damp with fear, every remaining atom of strength fled from her limbs, and she felt helpless as some infant.

Still nearer came the advancing train; it was almost at the house; the foremost carriage slackened speed; there was a general stoppage. She could contain herself in such horrible suspense no longer, but glided from her bed to the window, and there, by the light of the lamp below the sign, read, with blanched face, the names of her old masters.

For the instant a deadly sickness overcame her, then the necessity or supposed necessity for immediate action. To lie there when each minute was one of peril, to lie there when, if these passed by, more searching danger would menace her with

approach of the principals, was out of the question, a sheer impossibility!

She had been placed upon the bed without the removal of so much as her jacket, and now, snatching up her cap, she stole down the old-fashioned stairs, and was out in the back court-yard before the half-sleepy driver of the team had descended from the first of the Circus waggons. Not many such customers came that way, but all the men and all the maids must be in front; hence our boy-girl got clear off unseen by any other than a line of moles nailed to the barn door-post.

It seemed dreadfully cold turning out thus from the cosy shelter of that pleasant chamber, and she shivered and trembled first with fear, and next from the cold, until it became doubtful if a more miserable little mortal was abroad that night.

The wide gloomy country on either side looked so cheerless, so peopled by shadows, she scarcely dared to glance to right or left. Her teeth chattered as she recalled her feelings by Euston Square, by those trees that wore the shrouded and comfortless look, and those shrubs clustered together as though brooding in council.

The farther she proceeded upon the road the more dismal it became, with great black woods, and hideous lines of darkness. She could not go back because to return would be as horrible as to press on; more so, knowing its waste of gloom; whereas she might come upon some farm or cottage by keeping on. It was an alternative chilling and uncertain, and her heart sank when she remembered how early the folks went to bed in these quiet places; but she kept on, and held both hands clasped firm upon her bosom where Gabrielle's locket was warm as a thought of the absent one.

Every now and then she stood still and listened, trying to detect if the waggons were continuing upon their way. Nothing could be heard but the buzzing of hedge-side insects, croaking of frogs in ebony pools, or distant baying of some hound. She passed a farm with outlying buildings, and a range of stacks rising pale and weird of form by the road-side. Close down by one of these, with their backs to the hay for warmth, huddled two poor souls more wretched than herself,

asleep after a long day's tramping. She sped on, nor glanced to see if some open barn offered shelter until the morning. All the lights were out at the house, and the darkness before and beyond was but a change of deadness.

She came to a hill. Upon the summit was a stone, and, taking it for a mile-stone, she knelt down to decipher, if possible, the distance to the next town; but she read thereon with a shudder,—*Here Miller Coates, of Enfield, was murdered on the night of September the 3rd,* 1803.

Down the slope of that hill she ran, never daring to cast a look either way, and breathing a silent prayer for safety. Beyond this was a village street, with some few houses removed and stationed amongst trees gaunt and dusky; no lights, no shelter. To the rear a small, square-towered church, draped with ivy, looked in mourning for the dead that lay around; a great wooden door closed even the porch of this, and 'Walter' walked on with a still heavier heart.

Her strength was spent, and now it was a matter of great difficulty dragging her feet along from field to field. To fall there at the roadside would be to risk discovery by those she feared, coming that way sooner or later. She would crawl down one of the dreary misty meadows, and hide in some dry ditch. With this intention she opened a gate, the gate to a narrow lane, high-banked, and so overgrown with foliage it was dark as night; every glimpse of the starry sky was lost, and it was with cautious outfeeling slowness she made the progress she did.

It seemed to get darker at every step when all in a moment she was dazzled by a bright illumined scene, which, revealed so suddenly, seemed like enchantment. It was the *bijou* sitting-room of a charming cottage to which the lane was an approach: an apartment with open glass door and a perfect bower of flowers; a candelabrum of wax lights at the side caused all the brightness which at first so overcame the night-bound. Even from the outside it could be seen that this cottage was furnished in a rich and tasteful manner, and with a French lightness doubly captivating when contrasted with the long dark way preceding this glimpse of fairy land. The

occupant of the room heard the footstep, light as it was, and, rising from a couch, laid down the book he had been reading, and stepped out upon the gravel path of his garden. He was a rather handsome man, of pale complexion, and coal-black hair, partly curling, and pushed carelessly back from the temples. He wore a negligent tunic of black velvet, and was smoking a cigar of great fragrance. He gazed with surprise at the slender child before him, and with a gentle movement pushed her more into the light.

"Who are you?" he asked, at once deciding it was no village urchin after the peaches.

"My name is 'Walter Gordon'; I have lost my way. I will thank you so much for permission to rest till morning in your kitchen."

The gentleman—an artist of eminence accustomed to strange models, and with a quick eye for the beautiful, stood looking at this wild and bewildered, yet lovely vagrant, hesitating what to do; then he led her in and said,—

"Well, my young friend, I see no particular reason why you should not stay, although I do not keep open house in the general way; quite the reverse; but sit down and give me your references."

With which pleasant words and pleasant manner, accompanied with a smile of reassurance, he resumed his position, and proceeded with the enjoyment of the cigar.

"I did not expect a visitor to-night, I give you my word, young sir; but I am none the less pleased at being able to provide you with shelter, for, excuse me, you look anything but adapted to journeying at this hour. My servants go to bed early, but I will, by your leave, open an account between yourself and my larder."

"I thank you, sir; I shall feel glad of a little refreshment to take off the faintness and fatigue from which I am suffering."

"Come along then, and when you have recovered yourself you will tell me how you come in this plight. Running away from home, I suppose? Ran away from home myself when about your age; but I can see now what a young rascal I was; not to say you are a young rascal, until I know more of the

circumstances. But carry that *liqueur* of brandy and the candle, please, and we will see if some more becoming tinting may not be restored to those cheeks."

Saying this he good-humouredly led the way to the housekeeper's room, opening from which was the pantry, containing a variety of tempting viands, and from these he permitted his visitor to make her choice.

He admired this wanderer, who had appeared as though born of the book he was reading; and he conceived the project of inducing him to remain awhile, and conveying the expressive face and picturesque little form to his canvas. He was an artist of rare and delicate skill, whose paintings obtained hanging of honour at the Academy, and whose work was in great request in gallery and drawing-room.

Having fared modestly, and "retinted," at request of her new friend, to the extent of tasting the brandy and water her host had provided, 'Walter' returned with him to the small apartment by which she had entered.

"You are cold," said the artist thoughtfully, closing the window and fastening the shutter; and then the child did indeed feel more at home.

"And now tell me all about it," and he arranged himself gracefully upon the couch, having first motioned his visitor into a luxurious arm-chair; "I am all attention."

"You have been so kind to me, sir, I wish there was something to tell that would enlist your sympathy for me; but there is very little, and in that I am seen by a bad light, unfortunately."

"Leave the lights to me, my child; I am accustomed to bad lights. Is it home or school?"

"Home I have none, nor have I ever had. My schooling days have long been over. It is from a cruel apprenticeship I am escaping, and am on the way to kind strangers I have never seen, who are about to find me employment of some sort."

"I am sorry for you, because I believe you have no right to be in this position."

"No, indeed! My father was a gentleman; but where he

is, or if living even, is more than I can tell. I only know I am unutterably wretched!"

"Oh! come, come! I daresay I can alter this; or, at all events, I will try. You shall stay and assist me in my studio for a time, and learn something of painting—see yourself, if you like, in one or other of my pictures. I want some such face as yours for a goat-boy of the Tyrol, and a gondolier's son of Maggiore. You can pose to a picturesque attitude, I can see, and I shall be the indebted; so make yourself happy and contented. Stay as long as agreeable to you, and go when tired of the seclusion of an artist's woodland home. And now for bed; you are tired, my cigar is out, and we are early risers."

He held forth his hand with winning, welcoming hospitality, and 'Walter' took it, her eyes filled with tears, her sensitive heart more full of gratitude than words can tell. It was so complete a change in that short time she could scarcely realize it; she wondered if there was something she knew not of that attracted others to her in spite of her misfortunes? She might have been told it was the sad beauty of the large, speaking eyes, the aristocratic contour of form and feature, the tremulous refinement of voice, and the nameless charm never by any chance absent from her manner; and it was all this that had made her so valuable to the Circus, and so great a loss.

Later, in the tiny room opening from the larger chamber of the host, 'Walter,' lying awake, heard the rumbling of heavy waggons on the road above the lane,—heard, and without fear,—and rested with a delicious sense of safety, slept with a blissful peace unknown before, and dreamed, with hues of exquisite phantasy, a poem of the artist, of Gabrielle, of Lorry Vincent; and never awoke till morning.

She had scarcely dressed herself when her host, who was no other than Lord Ellerby, and who made this country house a studio for the exercise of his artistic fancies, came in to greet her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HÔNI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE.

When St. Aubyn came calmly to consider the consequences of his charitable action, he blamed himself for undue haste and excess of philanthropy. Yet what human being could or would have denied shelter, under such terrible circumstances, to any one? Had it not been for the assistance thus rendered, this venturesome yachtsman must have perished in the storm.

"I have only acted as any man with a grain of commiseration and pity would have done; and if, by mischance, Lena and he should meet, I must trust to her kind and grateful heart to keep me in mind, and to at once retire."

He knew nothing then of the morning's meeting, when Willie had surprised her at the harp, and she had said to him,—

"I did not know, while watching you from the cliff, and wishing I could let myself down to you, that it was the Willie I've been so longing to see."

"No; or else you would really have done so?" and he took her hand, gazing in her eyes, and saying, as eloquently as could be, "How beautiful you are, and how much I admire you!"

"Well, I think I should. I am rather fond of birds'-nesting, and I wouldn't have made any trouble about it."

Mr. Arden laughed. It was a boyish, honest, enjoyable laugh; and Lena, who had heard little enough of this sort of music, looked innocently into his face, and said,—

"Oh! I wish you would laugh once more,—it's delightful! And how good-looking you are, to be sure! Do you know,

you remind me of the noble Greeks in one of Papa's books—Homer. I suppose you know Homer?"

"I'm sorry to say I do," replied William Arden, with a wry face, "a little too intimately."

"Well, now sit down. I want you to talk to me, and tell me something I wish to know; I cannot ask that tedious Mrs. Brandon, because she launches out into such a lecture upon love and nonsense of that sort, and I've resolved never to have anything to do with it."

Mr. Arden's hair began to stand on end. He had never heard a young lady talk like this one; it was *naïveté* with a vengeance. Yet she was so bewitchingly pretty, he was over head and ears in love with her already.

She made him sit down beside her, watching anxiously for the smiles she so loved to see, and which were like letters of some new and delightful language.

"Tell me," she said, "is the world so very large, beyond the boarding of our garden?"

"Rather!" he replied, with a merry twinkle.

"You've been round it in your yacht?"

"Not all round it."

"I want to know why in all the poems I have read, the men make such commotion about the maids. Why is it? Now can you tell me? I cannot get Papa or Mrs. Brandon to explain to me half I want to know."

"May I ask if you are alluding to the Homer?"

"Don't say '*may* I ask,' but ask outright; and you may call me 'dear,' if you like; it's short and pretty, and I shall be pleased with it from your lips. Mrs. Brandon says, 'dear' as though she meant griffin, or some other cold-blooded animal. You have yet to make that lady's acquaintance, and you'll not forget it. But now tell me the allegory of men and maids."

"Goodness knows! I don't. You'd better ask my father; he has lived longer in this wicked world!" And with mock gravity Mr. Arden seriously looked the fair girl in the face, for as yet he could hardly believe his senses, and feared she might turn out bold and forward after all.

"If this is all genuine," he said to himself, "she is the most exquisite little girl I have ever been acquainted with, and I shall think it a burning shame if she does not see the world beyond the boarding of their garden, and under my able and chivalrous tutorship. We are old friends by this, and need be under very little ceremony,—as for ceremony, she won't let one!"

"But tell me," she persisted, "why do all the men, in all the poems and all the pictures, seem to think of nothing but pursuing and capturing those like myself?"

He was completely posed by this out-Heroding of simplicity, but explained the best way he could,—

"You see, dear, when the Flood was setting things to rights, the animals all consorted two and two for company, and the sociableness and sympathy thus provoked has continued as a lasting memento of what ought to be! If you were to go into that strange and crowded world of which you have spoken, you would there see the same linked companionship."

"How very strange! And these links,—are they ever broken?"

"Very often, I'm sorry to say!" answered Mentor, with a half grave, half comical expression of countenance.

"Ah, that's a pity! And can one link with another at will?"

"Well, not exactly; a little understanding is necessary, not to mention propriety."

"Because I was going to say, I should like to link with you!"

Mr. Arden could really stand no more; he could tolerate as much as most young yachtsmen, but this was going a step too far; and adjusting his collar with dignity, while assuming the aspect of true British decorum, he said,—

"My dear young lady, knowing you have never been to boarding-school, I make allowance for your ignorance; but do let me beg of you to reform your style of conversation; because if you ever should get abroad, and indulge in this sort of talk with everybody you meet, I don't know what will become of you."

She was easily wounded, and began to cry, chiefly because she feared she had offended him.

"I can't help it; I know nothing, I never see anybody; I want some one to talk to of my own age, some one, as you say is proper, with whom to link myself—"

"Yes, but I am not of your own age; I am ever so much older than you!"

She stood beside him, placed a hand in his, and said firmly, —"I do so want to see this great world and its people. Will you take me? I am never likely to if you will not. Promise me, when you are well enough, and go away from here, that I shall accompany you. Promise me!"

It was the one thing of all others he would have liked; but this very candour so effectually disarmed him, he could but think of the man whose happiness was bound up in this child.

"But your father, my dear Miss St. Aubyn; think! I am sure he would not consent, and to do this opposed to his wishes would be to act treacherously. Do you know you remind me awfully of Eve, with your innocence, and guilelessness, and desire for knowledge? Now let me tell you, when Eve had that desire gratified, there was no more innocence and no more happiness!"

"But you will forgive my saying, Mr. Willie, that I know just as much as you do about those Scripture stories; and neither you nor I have any right to say there was no more innocence and no more happiness. I could know all I want to know and preserve both, and link myself into the bargain!"

"You are incorrigible!"

"I think I am, and the best thing you can do is to try and make me better!"

"I shouldn't have taken all the trouble I have, to come and see you, had I suspected you to be the troublesome young lady you are!" he said, rising.

She laughed merrily, placing her hands upon his mouth, and they were good friends enough. It was quite a brotherly and sisterly friendship, and, with William Arden's sense of prudence and of right, seemed perfectly safe, even though he had lingered so long in those waters for the purpose of her

expressed wish, and even though he now felt that he could love her with the gold and not the dross of love.

He shook the proffered hand, and giving it a little squeeze, said,—

"Good-bye for the present, I must return to my room, or I shall have nurse back, rating me soundly for disobeying her orders."

Soon afterwards Mrs. Brandon came in, finding the girl sitting melancholy beside her harp.

"What is the matter,—another string broken?"

"Oh, yes, another string broken!"

"Tell its Brandon all about it, there's a dearie!"

"You're not my Brandon, and, if I had my will, would be somebody else's instead of Papa's!"

The quiet lady very demurely removed a speck of dust from her white cuff and permitted it to border the hand reposing between the folds of her black silk dress, looking the embodiment of respectable, if aggrieved, gentility.

"My young lady is outrageously uncomplimentary; but there's one thing, it's said *before* my face."

"And isn't half so bad as the things I should say behind your back, only I've nobody to say them to, except dear old Martha Saxe. I always spend all my time with her, in picking you to pieces."

Mrs. Brandon shrugged her shoulders with a gesture of mild contempt.

"I should like to know what has put you out to-day."

"Well, then, know and tremble: I have seen *him*, and he isn't half so nice as I expected. You said he would kiss me, but he didn't."

"Of course not at first; they never do; it's hand-shaking to begin with, and one thing leads to another."

"It's too slow for me: all at once, and then something else, is my motto! And I asked him to take me to see the world, and he refused to do that!"

"Of course he would,—getting himself into a mess through a child like you. Why, it's punishable by law. You must not lay him open to any such contingency, but watch his

departure, and go after him. That, you see, saves him from the compromising nature of the proceeding."

"What's that?"

"I cannot explain now: I really think sometimes, child, you plead ignorance for the purpose."

"Of course I do, to be enlightened; you might have seen an instance of that just now."

"I heard it; I was in the breakfast parlour with the door open. You rather overstepped the bounds of youthful modesty; young men think so much of that. I trembled for you as though you had been my own."

"You are an old hypocrite! Where's Papa?"

"In the study, you playful child. Oh, what pleasure there must be in the enjoyment of such excellent spirits! Mark my sedateness; that is affliction, dear; the rough usage of the world."

"Well, if the world takes upon every one the effect it has upon you, I think I had better keep out of it." And with this parting shot, Lena ran off to St. Aubyn, leaving the duenna looking particularly sour.

He was paler than usual, and the hand trembled while twining the soft curls about her head. The reverent, loving touch told all the wondrous passion which had been the blessing, yet might prove the bane, of that bruised life.

"Please, Papa, I've come to tell you I've seen Willie Arden. I thought it right to tell you;" said, not in the spirit of confession but of confidence, and so spontaneously, he knew nothing had occurred to which even he could take exception; and yet how it paralysed him! One cannot board up a treasure from the world so many years to discuss tamely the natural history of a possible poacher.

"And does my darling feel much the happier, having done so?"

"Not much, he's rather stupid. But I should think a young man exactly like him, who knew a thing or two, would be very nice."

"My dear Lena, I entirely disapprove of this style of criticism; it is rude, and partakes of levity."

"Well, I don't know anything about that; I talk pretty much as I feel. Ah, there's Kit, I've to pay her out for teasing Dick!" Abruptly descending from his knee, she swooped upon the unfortunate culprit, a magnificent cat of foreign breed, one of the costly toys St. Aubyn had provided to promote her pleasure and enjoyment. It is doubtful if she had ever had one wish ungratified save that dangerous but perfectly natural one of the discovery of the world. The world that was probably so large, filled with so many more things than she had ever seen, and where beings moved who were altogether different to those she had hitherto met,—heroic and handsome men, and women like a throng of Queens. She had an old book of geography secreted away somewhere, containing a description of the mighty Metropolis; and a quaint Court History, from which she deduced the conclusion that London was principally inhabited by Lords and Ladies, Dukes and Duchesses, Earls and Countesses, compared with whom plain Mr.'s were as nothing. She had longed for some one who would talk with her upon these matters—tell her of the exalted beings of whom she had but her own fancy to guide her in conceiving. Mentioning them to St. Aubyn was to give instant pain; the poet face clouded, and he would almost querulously entreat her not to talk or think of any such nonsense: wherefore she thought the more.

Finding matters had gone as far as they had, St. Aubyn, making a grace of necessity, sent to William Arden, inviting him down to join them, at the same time forwarding a note to his old friend, William's father, acquainting him with what had occurred, and delicately suggesting that he should drive over for his son. Mr. Arden was pastor of a village six miles from the coast, peopled by fisher families, stone-quarriers, labourers of the agricultural tracts, and stragglers from Whitby, poor men, but skilled in the carving of jet. The Rev. Mr. Arden entertained affectionate esteem for the master of the Boarded House, knowing he was his sole visitor, and being to some extent in the confidence of the recluse, for whom, although not agreeing with, he was full of sympathy. His parish and rural labours had yielded no experience of the finer phases of human

suffering; it had been in the rough for the most part, and when, years ago, the cultured inmate of the great new house upon the cliff had sent for him, and there in his own house at regular intervals received the ministry of the church, Mr. Arden had welcomed the unusual break in the monotony of dull country labour with excessive pleasure, and the two became quietly appreciative companions. Once or twice he had ventured to reason with the stately scholar thus isolated from the world, but Ashton St. Aubyn was not, at this day, a man to be reasoned with. In past times it might have been otherwise.

William Arden was relieved to find that Lena was just as vivacious, contrary, and absurd, in the presence of Mrs. Brandon and her father as she had been when with himself; and was so much of a child still. One of the first things done upon his joining them in the sitting-room being to introduce him to her doll, a large and very beautiful specimen of wax moulding.

"Don't you like dolls?" she asked disappointedly, seeing it was received with awkwardness; the young man really not understanding the handling of it.

"Not much."

"Ah! Perhaps you like those who play with them better?"

Now here was a confusing question, especially when illustrated by her roguish smile. He nodded slightly and escaped to St. Aubyn, who was cutting the leaves of a newspaper with marked deliberation.

"I have been admiring the view from your house, Mr. St. Aubyn. You displayed true artistic judgment in the selection of its site."

The master bowed. "Do you think so? My chief object was to escape tourists and the other abominable offshoots and stragglers from modern Society."

"Grumpy old tyrant," said William to himself, "I thought he would like me to admire his fortress." Mr. St. Aubyn handed him the paper, and William, who was very forgiving, forgave at once. He glanced through the journal, glad of the occupation, with a quiet look now and again at the fair girl trimming her ferns.

"Sleperton Manor House!" exclaimed William suddenly, looking up from his reading. "Why, my father has a pencil drawing of that place over the mantelpiece in his room! I don't know how he came to be possessed of it, but I am almost sure that is the name."

"Well, what is the matter, sir? A fire?" asked St. Aubyn, rising, and, without betraying any conspicuous interest, manifesting a slight impatience.

"Oh! no, this is the paragraph, I will read it.

"'We have it upon creditable authority that the fine old residence known as Sleperton Manor House, the ancestral seat of the Lindons, which has been for many years unoccupied, is being restored and refurnished in expectation of the return of Lady Lindon, who, after prolonged absence in India, will, it is stated, sojourn several months in the year at the Manor House.'"

Mrs. Brandon rose, quietly observing, "I think Williams has come back, sir;" then holding the door ajar, and making way respectfully; St. Aubyn, as he passed out, rewarded her with a glance of deep gratitude. Hortense Brandon never lost an opportunity of seizing the time and tune, and it was by such little things that she maintained the ascendancy she possessed. She saw he was suffering acutely; and her instinct told her she would win gratitude by thus contriving his retreat.

Within a couple of hours the Rev. Mr. Arden arrived, greatly to William's surprise and somewhat to his annoyance. It seemed such happiness to be sitting down in the same room with Lena, who was so unlike any being he had ever met. She had acquired unlimited sway.

After the old gentleman had expressed exuberant gratitude for the preservation of his boy, and affectionately embraced him, Mr. Arden and St. Aubyn retired to the study, where the master acquainted his friend with the strange piece of news concerning Sleperton Manor House.

"You would do well to take such gossip with reservation, my dear sir; but there is nothing to prevent your running down yourself, and ascertaining if it is correct."

St. Aubyn shook his head. "I do not like to desert Lena

even for that short time: and after all, why should I trouble or care? Am I not dead to all the world? Lady Lindon is welcome to return, although the motive, I admit, is inexplicable to me."

"Do not be restless about Lena, if you would like to go. My son's term has almost expired, and he will return to his duties on Monday evening at the latest."

"Thanks, my dear friend. You, knowing all, know also how sincere is my appreciation of your thoughtfulness. I should like to see the old place once again."

"Then go, and God speed you. I would accompany you, myself, but that I shall render you greater service by watching over your one ewe lamb. I will drive over every day. By-the-bye, you have confidence in this Mrs. Brandon; I mean to the extent of leaving her in charge?"

"Perfect confidence; she studies my happiness closely. She has peculiarities like the rest of us, but is an estimable and worthy person. A clergyman's widow, by the way, I have always understood!"

"Then I am not surprised her husband is no longer amongst us!" said Mr. Arden to himself.

It was time to go. Lena, winding a ball of wool by the window, looked up to say good-bye, first to Mr. Arden and next to his son; St. Aubyn standing near, feeling as though he could sever the hand touching that of his darling. He had suffered himself, once; and time was when he was the most unsuspecting of men.

"Good-bye, Miss Lena!" There was such clear, honest light in his Saxon eyes, even St. Aubyn felt ashamed of his annoyance.

"Good-bye, Willie!" she said, returning his look so roguishly his good resolutions tottered again; and to complete her wickedness, she let fall a pair of sleeve-links, which he picked up and handed back to her with a face that was scarlet.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ONE EWE LAMB.

On the Monday following, St. Aubyn left home. It was the first time he had been absent, and the forebodings he experienced he looked upon as natural, and in no sense in the light of a presentiment. It required some resolution to make up his mind upon this question of departure, but this hesitation seemed so weak and unmanly, he strove to forget the disinclination altogether in remembrance of the pleasure it would give him to visit again, if but for an hour, the old Manor House at Sleperton.

Lena did not like it at all. She pouted, turned very cross, would not say good-bye at first, or accept his farewell kiss, and repeatedly declared she would go as well. However, it was managed somehow, and the wilful beauty appeared reconciled to her banishment. He promised to bring her all sorts of presents, and made her write out a list of all the things she wanted in the world. He would return on Tuesday evening, if not too late, the nights being dark, and the road a lonely one; or on Wednesday morning at the furthest.

After going some distance from the house, he could not resist returning to say "good-bye" again, half disposed to give up his journey; it was so hard to leave her.

"Take care of her," he said, with dim eyes, holding Mrs. Brandon's hand in his, "you cannot tell how hard it is for me to leave her!" All sympathy, her face wearing a tenderly compassionate look, the worthy and estimable person pledged herself to exert the most solicitous guardianship. And he went away sad and dull, but contented.

"And now, my darling, is your time!" said the sweet woman when they were alone. "Young Mr. Arden cannot have started; make him take you to London and give you a glimpse of the City of Lords and Ladies!"

"Oh, Mrs. Brandon, but is there time? Can I get back before Papa returns?"

"Get back! Why, there's time to go to China! You'll never have another opportunity!"

"Papa will be so grieved when I tell him, for I should tell him, and directly."

"Of course you would, you are always doing some such ridiculous action. But decide, and I'll get your things together, and take them to the foot of the cliff, where I will wait till you join me!"

"I'm so bewildered now it comes to the chance, but nevertheless, I should like to go, and of course Willie can take care of me; but will *you* go, dear Mrs. Brandon? You haven't had a holiday for some time!"

"Not now, my child, I—am—waiting! Sight-seeing always gives me the headache; but you are young, and have all to see!"

"Yes, I will go!" cried Lena, starting up, and clapping her hands, the pretty face irradiated with smiles. And then that faithful woman put together a few articles of clothing such as the child would be likely to want for her journey. Muttering at her work, she disclosed, had any one been there to listen, the nature of her diabolical plot.—"Now, Missy, I shall be even with you for your studied impertinence, and with you, Mr. Noel Barnard, for your worse deceit. Return! No, she will not return; wrong blood in her veins! And a lovely child like that adrift upon the world will find no lack of friends to prevent it. You want to see the world, my dear, and the Lords, and the Dukes, and the Earls? Well, you're going to, and I hope you'll see one you fancy, and leave this precious hermit to my tender care! If Master Arden's the laddie I take him for, he'll perfect the education he has been privileged to commence. So, I've done my best for you! A mother couldn't have done more!" Cold, snake-like, bitter

as death, the tone and the voice. Was there no spirit hovering near, to bring back the loving guardian of the child's tender youth?—Was there no influence to re-direct homeward his reluctant steps, so that this terrible catastrophe might be averted? Alas! all seemed favourable to the false woman's scheme. She quitted the house unobserved, and at the foot of the cliff was shortly afterwards joined by the young lady. Even this was new ground to Lena, and she looked about her with a sense of delight and wonderment.

Although a long walk, they went over the ground quickly, animated by very opposite feelings; to Lena the distance seemed nothing, all was so new and strange. And so this was the world? She loved it already! She had seen little of it yet, however, save the grey stone cottages, and cotter girls with handkerchiefs about their heads. When the village was reached she was properly impressed by its size and the quaint groups of cottages; but it was at the house of Parson Arden that she felt the greatest thrill—this also was of stone, and grey, but so covered with creepers it looked like some picture.

William Arden was reclining on a garden seat, cigar in mouth and dozing; and now came the need for caution by Mrs. Brandon, who, like all creatures of the reptile class, had an inner sense which indicates the enemy; the lady entertained a strong objection to being seen from the Parsonage windows. They adopted the device of throwing a pebble. Lena aimed it, and hit Mr. Arden upon the nose; he got up, swearing at the humble bees, and then heard his name called from the direction of the roadway.

"Willie!" He was over the fence in a flash, and found Lena there, blushing and beautiful, and he bowed to her with a happy smile over all his face.

"I've come, Willie!"

"So I see! I was but just dreaming of you. How good of you to give us a call! But come in, father's preparing his sermon, and there is no one to interfere with us!"

"I haven't time, I'm going with you to London, and *must* come back to-morrow!"

He opened his eyes wide at that. Mrs. Brandon explained all, aside. "If you don't take her, she'll go alone!"

"Then so she shall," said Willie, who did not believe a word of it, and who, to do him justice, would never have acted in the manner required of him; "but *I* advise Miss Lena's return to the house; why, you cannot know what you are talking about, either of you!"

"I do not," replied the companion, with an extremely simple air. "I know no more of the dear child's fancy for London than I know of London itself, but I do know she is bent upon going, and that it will take a stronger will than mine to turn her!"

"Then let mine be that stronger will! Oh, Lena *dear*, I would not take my own little sister, had I one, how much less you!—Stay away; rest content with your beautiful home, I beg!"

"It's all very well for you who have been all over the world, and seen everything, to give that advice; but do you know, Willie, I am growing up an ignoramus as regards geography? Whatever shall I know, and whatever good shall I be?"

"You will know quite enough and be good enough to make any honest man happy, Lena, and to be the sunshine of his home and heart." He took her hand; she did not withdraw it; and he thought he had gained his point, when at a sign from Mrs. Brandon she said "Good-bye." Yes, he imagined she would return to the House upon the Cliff.

"Now," said Mrs. Brandon, when Willie Arden was out of sight, "as that young man will not prove your friend, I must!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ADRIFT.

Mrs. Brandon hailed the driver of a waggon plodding at slow speed along the main road; the man contemplated her with an obtuse, insolent stare.

"Are you going many miles along the London road, my good fellow?"

"Yes I be, a matter o' ninety or so!"

"Then, if I give you five shillings, you'll give my niece a lift, and set her down wherever you're bound for?"

"Ay, that I will, an' with pleasure, an' take moighty care on her; so jump ye up, my lass, here's a heap o' sacks, and sure you're welcome!"

But the child demurred.

"Come, don't be silly, the man can't wait. Now's your time, my love, and a pleasant journey!" And the child, who knew nothing of travelling or of distance, did so, the woman kissing her black-mittened hand, while the waggon went slowly on its way.

"Well, I fancy you're a little bit of a fool, William," said the plotter, as she cautiously passed Mr. Arden's house on her way home, "and I think Miss Lena St. Aubyn is wiped off the slate!"

Sheltered from the wind, shadowed from the sun, enthroned upon her pile of sacks, Lena's advent into the world was a tolerably curious one; and, both amused and frightened, she looked along the broad backs of the horses at the white stretch of road-way, and wondered what marvels were in store for her. The rough smock of the countryman and his wide-awake hat

were objects of singular interest to her, and she wondered at his red neck and face and the silly smile puckering his cheeks, but not impressed by these, she confined her attention to the scenery upon either side.

Not so her companion, who, never having seen anything so fresh and pretty, fed his eyes greedily. Disposed to be good-natured, he produced a hunch of bread and bacon, which he offered to share with her, but she declined it with civil thanks.

"Be's you a milkmaid from the village?" he asked.

"No, I be'nt!" replied the girl, copying the dialect, and returning his gaze unflinchingly.

"Well, what be ye?"

"That's neither here nor there; you were paid to give me a lift, weren't you, not to ask questions? Save those for my aunt when you get back!"

He said no more, and the girl had a long, silent, tedious interval to herself, and she thought there was not so much to see in the world after all. They did certainly pass an ancient castle, partly in ruins and partly inhabited, and Lena gazed with speculative interest on the ivied turrets and narrow loop-holes set in dismantled battlements. They came, after this, upon a rock-scattered expanse of moorland, upon purple reaches of thick under-growth, upon stone walls winding away, dividing the property, upon streams gushing over the boulders and rippling amongst the bracken, upon mills with lofty chimneys that struck the girl with amazement, and long arrays of windows where the factories clove the landscape with a clear white line; they came upon low-pitched cottages, with great gardens, from which their summer splendour had departed; and genteel houses that seemed to frown down upon the others of less degree, and slim-spired churches in sharp relief against the sky. There was ample time for observing all, for their progress was slow; but the girl commenced to weary of it, looking back.

"I do think that Willie Arden a disagreeable thing!" she said to herself, fidgeting the ear of one of the sacks, and feeling tired of sitting so long in one position.

"If you don't mind, I should like to get down for a little

while, and when we come to the next inn have something to eat and drink!" He pulled up at that, and the girl sprang lightly to the ground. It was a singular sensation, that of unfettered freedom even after the years of gentle restraint. At liberty to go whither she would, no one to say her nay, the wide world before her, and no one to control or stop her wandering. Yet for all the sense of pleasant liberty she missed the loving voice to which she had been so long accustomed, the face with its melancholy beauty and imperious firmness. Looking at the sky where the arch was losing the brightness of its lustre, she asked her guide when they would reach the end of their journey.

"Not afore to-morrow arternoon or evening, mum; and we'll have to go well to do it by then!" he replied, affectionately whisking a fly from the horse's flank.

The girl stood overwhelmed. Why, she must be back again by that! "Whatever could Mrs. Brandon have been thinking of?" and, cast upon her own resources, she thought more deeply than ever before in her life. She had plenty of money with her, and would not waste time crawling along the world like a snail: she would travel in one of those things they had seen darting along the embankment, with volleys of smoke and sparks flying from the head.

"You see that," pointing to the serpent disappearing in the distance, "isn't that a train?"

"Yes, mum!"

"Take me to where they stop and wait for the people, and I'll give you half a crown."

"Well, sure an' I will! New Malton's close by here, and the station, where ye can book for York or London, or wheresomever ye choose!"

At the station her plaintive "I want to go to London, please!" so thawed a stony dignitary in fustian, that he took her under his especial care, procured her a ticket, and placed her securely in a first-class compartment. Then began a new sensation; and can anything be more startling than travelling thus for the first time? The country seemed to her to be flying past the windows, and she was speculating upon the

meaning of those long wires running along beside them, and moving now up, now down; when they glided into a great maze of houses and streets, and she saw for the first time a City. "York" was called out, and she referred in memory to the geography of that place, but could remember nothing of it, and she looked down upon the outspread panorama with awe and admiration. The bustle and confusion upon the platform, and excitement of the day altogether, gave her a slight headache; one lady and gentleman in the carriage were very kind, however, and in spite of the commotion she felt more at home than she had done in the waggon.

Another long track, but which from the diversity of the scenery on either side appeared short to the novice, and Doncaster was reached. Here she was much amused at a number of hounds, slim, graceful, tawny, or leaden coloured, held in leash, and which she wished to jump out and fondle; never having seen such, they pleased her by their elegance and glossy coats. The compartment filled up here; three gentlemen in grey shooting-dress, and evidently, from directions given to servants in livery, the owners of the greyhounds, entering with much ease of manner and laughter. These, quickly remarked their fair neighbour, her eyes not drooping for very innocence, beneath their bold gaze, they began to think "What manner of maid is this?" One desired politely to know whether she would like the window closed. Another remarked upon the extreme beauty of the day. The third did not speak, but looked, and the child edged nearer her female fellow-passenger. This lady kindly inquired how far she was going, and she replied to London. Both the lady and her husband regarded her with benevolent interest. There was an understanding of some occult nature between the three gentlemen, who looked at the blushing girl and at one another, and appeared particularly relieved, when at Retford, the lady and gentleman prepared to leave the carriage. A pleasant prospect changing very much when, having removed their wraps and bags from the carriage, the lady called Lena to her and said,—

"Come out of this carriage, my dear; I think we can find you a more comfortable one!" And they placed her in a

compartment where the majority of the occupants were ladies. How the defenceless are watched over! Could St. Aubyn have contemplated for one moment the contingency of his beautiful child ever being boarded in with three men of the world, as appeared for the moment imminent! Yet utter strangers saw, and saved! What a long time it takes us to believe there really are people so graciously thoughtful.

Lena's new neighbours were a Sister of Mercy (who puzzled her extremely), and her friend, a lady of severe neatness, engaged in knitting a stocking, and who asked her if she was confirmed. Not understanding the meaning of the question, Lena answered in the affirmative, and the lady nodded with placid satisfaction. There was also a lady of florid belongings, who was in a state of much uneasiness concerning a pet parrot she carried in its cage upon her knee; this lady became violently excited at each stopping-place, because, upon despatching one of the officials to ascertain, she discovered that the refreshment contractors did not supply bird-seed, and, for this reason, falling foul of the good man and every member of his family, and of every servant of the company, and the whole railway system altogether. Lena felt rather afraid of this lady, but she solicited permission to look at the parrot, so mollifying the Amazon that she uncovered the bird, which, beginning immediately to call the Sister of Mercy names, had to be sent to roost again without an introduction. And there was a very thin and wedge-like lady who sat bolt upright, fixing the child with a steely stare, and never looking to the right hand or the left; Lena, who supposed she had a stiff neck, felt full of compassion, and not in the least affected by the metallic expression. There was a little gentleman, in a great hurry, fuming because the train was so late, and vowing he would make a complaint; it was very irritating, but the others could not help it, and took no further notice of him, the parrot pecked at him through the brown paper until the gentleman's eyes watered to wring that parrot's neck. Her fellow-passengers sufficiently amused our little girl to make the distance bridging Retford and Peterborough one half the length it seemed to the ordinary traveller.

And all this time the sky grew paler, and a deeper blue was spreading in the east; at some of the village houses lights began to twinkle, and windows of road-side ale-houses shone red upon dusky backgrounds of fallow land. The streamlets, winding like shining ribands athwart dull green acres, looked weird and ghastly, and like the decoration of *diablerie*. Farm-yards were shadowy, and the clustered cattle looked like ungainly masses of sombre colour. Stars came forth one by one; she wondered were these the stars she had so often watched, and she thought with a sigh of the dear old house upon the cliff.

When St. Albans was reached, the lights in the shop-windows and lively aspect of the town at its brightest time caused the child to wish herself at her journey's end; she had taken little refreshment during the day, being buoyed up by excitement, and now faintness and lowness were the natural consequences of the reaction. She was told London was near, and she looked forth with renewed interest. And towns were thicker together here; they seemed to glide from one to another, quick almost as thought, and houses became more numerous between the towns. Then streets in line, then great works, and netting of vast lines of lights, huge buildings, and a mass of houses, with a hazy cloud overhanging the City, and no more stars or clear blue sky; distant rumbling of the traffic, swaying in the air of the mighty buzz, a throb as of a great heart beating, a crush of confused sounds, glimpses of thronged streets, keen echoes of the business doing, crowds of hurrying men and women, and soft gliding of the compartment alongside a platform; then Babel.

"What is this?" she asked, with a frightened look. And the answer came,—

"It is London!" And they hastened away, leaving her sitting in the carriage, rubbing her eyes, and not knowing what to do next. A guard came up,—

"Now, miss, if you please!" looking with some suspicion at the confused young mortal. And she left the carriage, and was jostled about to the end of the platform, and from thence into the streets, where she staggered, so overwhelming was that new experience.

She did not know what to do, but looked in the shop windows, and, tired though she was, felt vastly entertained. But what a contrast to her calm, uneventful life!

She was at King's Cross, and she threaded her way amongst the people with brave determination to see the most in the short time before her. Keeping to the line of shops, and following the way vehicles and those upon the pavement were chiefly moving, she took the western direction; and, after walking some distance along Euston Road, arrived at a confusing junction of dazzling thoroughfares, where, indeed, Tottenham Court Road and Hampstead Road intersect the main route. The glitter enticing her each way, and reminding her of her fanciful visions of Lord and Ladydom, she ventured to accost a pleasant-looking woman of many colours.

"Can you tell me, ma'am, where the Lords and Ladies walk, if you please?"

Whereat the woman looked down upon this country questioner with a comical expression, but told her genially enough,—

"You must make for the west, my dear, ask for Regent Street; any one will direct you; but first take yonder road and go to its end, when you can ask again."

The matron looked, long after the pretty child had walked away in the direction pointed out, and she said, "Pity she is out alone this time of the evening! I hope her poor mother knows on it; indeed I wish I hadn't told her the way now!"

And Lena trudged onward, as unconscious of ill in the great City as of its extent; onward by way of Tottenham Court Road into Oxford Street; and then asked for Regent Street, and was guided by the undeviating courtesy of the Londoner. Shops were closed for the most part in the grand crescent, but many over-dressed people were walking the promenade. Were these the Lords and Ladies, she wondered? How beautiful the City looked!—and she wandered on until she came to a square where, right opposite, was a large building illuminated, and highly brilliant; and asking of an old Irishwoman its meaning, was told it was the "Palace."

"Then there," cried Lena, "must be where the Lords and Ladies walk?"

And assured with a fiendish grin that such was the case, this dove, fallen so mishappily upon grimy City-ways, made for the glittering temple of amusement, and was pausing before the entrance, wondering how best to obtain admittance, and watching with vivid interest the Lords and Ladies arriving in their chariots. Then, noticing a man of most kind and thoughtful aspect, and who bore more than any she had seen, in her opinion, an air of lordliness, although to be sure its nobility was somewhat faded, she timidly stopped him, while hurrying on his way intent in thought, and talking importantly to himself.

"Will you tell me, sir, where I may see the Lords and Ladies?"

And he drew himself up with a jerk, looking down on the piece of blushing eagerness before him, perhaps caught by the wistfulness in her eloquent eyes, or moved by that confidence in himself.

"To be sure I will; at my lodgings. They are coming to-night, and you will be welcome! And better there than out here at this time of the night." And the man they thought mad took the little stranger reverently by the hand, leading her to a quiet street where few lights served to bedazzle, and but a few of London's citizens found their way; and on the course thereto he said to her impressively,—

"I am Sir Dickson Cheffinger—you will not forget my name—Sir Dickson Cheffinger. Always call me so, before our noble and illustrious guests, and alone! And you?"

"*I* am a Princess!"

"I have waited for this!" cried Sir Dickson breathlessly.

"The man they thought mad took the little stranger reverently by the hand,"—PAGE 248.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LENA.

The effect of Lena's announcement upon Mr. Cheffinger was so startling and all-absorbing that he scarcely deemed it proper to violate etiquette by any longer walking by her side. With the most supreme homage he stood aside, while she preceded him into the humble lodging, and with the graceful deference of a courtier of the old school, he waited at the foot of the stairs until she had passed.

"May it please your highness to enter the chamber immediately upon your right."

It was dark, and she tumbled over a hassock; but royalty does not keep on the ground long, and this vivacious representative was not very much discomposed. Mr. Cheffinger was in agony; to think that a Princess,—the Princess, doubtless, he had been so long expecting,—should meet with such a disaster in his reception-room filled him with sincere regret, and for the time deprived him of the power of searching for the lucifer matches. Whilst this necessary quest was pursued, and the poor fellow, in sore confusion, fumbled about for those useful articles, it was with accompaniment of nervous explanation :—

"I very much beg your highness's pardon, and am sorry to keep you waiting. My man is away for a holiday during my stay in town, and I am so apt, in the hurry of seeing visitors off, to mislay the tapers; I never can recollect where I saw them last,—came upon them the other day in the coffee-pot. 'Now, how,' said I to the Duke, who was waiting much as you may be waiting now, 'how, by the heralds', came they there?' 'Some of those fellows again,' said his Royal High-

ness, 'up to their pranks.' And so I suppose it was; but where they are now is more than I can fathom."

Lena began to feel a little alarmed. It was all very well to have her rank admitted,—she had so styled herself in a playful mood, remembering, with half a pang, the Master's term of endearment,—but looking for Lords and Ladies in the dark was not much good. The worst of it was, as Mr. Cheffinger groped, he knocked over everything that came in his way. Commencing with the mantel-piece, he made a clean sweep round the room; some articles were broken, more were too solid to break, but the clatter was ominous, and the visitor was thinking about retiring, when the absent-minded gentleman discovered the box under the pillow of the pallet in one corner of the room. Upon a light being obtained, a scene of extraordinary confusion was revealed, the whole place being upside-down and in a state of terrific disorder. The maid of the house, standing in fear of this particular lodger, preserved her own safety by leaving him to himself, and never intruding, much to the said lodger's satisfaction. Being engaged in the pursuit of the mission for one or other of his employers, neither of whom had seen or communicated with him since entering upon his work, he was absent the whole day. He was beginning to feel a little disheartened. He had traced his friend the Minister's interest right away from Devon into Hertfordshire, but there he had lost all clue. He had stood near to a great estate known as Beresford Park, and in front of the stone portals of the entrance-gates, invoking the lordly denizen of that domain until the lodge-keeper had let the dog at him, and poor Cheffinger had beaten a precipitate retreat. It was very mortifying, after the tedious tracing for so great a distance, effected under all sorts of disastrous misadventure; and the indefatigable explorer resolved upon returning to those noble friends in Brighton, who visited him when quietly at home in his humble state, but so few of whom cared to notice him now that he was always on the move. To make matters more critical, his store of specie was nearly exhausted; and he returned to London, and there remained, using the utmost economy, and devoting every day to the

interests of those who, in return for his success, would restore to him his rights and privileges. First to one end of London and then to another he had been, in search of anybody who corresponded with the description furnished with so much accuracy. A clearer head might have been pardoned for becoming muddled over such an interminable errand; but the state of muddle Dickson Cheffinger's brain got into defies description.

"You see, it's the crossings," he explained to the Princess, after narrating the manifold experience of the past few days. "I get half over, and don't know which way to take, and so many are shouting at once, I cannot attend to all; and in the midst of it Lord Somebody will hail me from one of the corners, and when I get there be gone! I was nearly run over the other evening," he said, with solemnity, "and had I not raised a hand and cried, 'Back! It is Sir Dickson Cheffinger!' I should have been. It was an honoured name once in London,—shall be again!"

Lena listened with patience and sympathy; she was glad to have come in the way of the good, innocent, kind, if feeble-minded one, and gave him her hand, which he raised to his lips with a gallantry delightful to witness.

"And do you never expect to discover the poor boy who ran away, Sir Dickson?"

"Oh, yes! I shall come upon the little chap one of these days in my walks."

"And then you will get back your papers?"

"I pray so, fervently!"

"And what will you do with the poor boy?—Hand him over to his master?"

"No," replied the man they thought mad; "I shall send him on his way, tell him to be a good boy, and never to do it again."

"Then you are a dear, kind Sir Cheffinger, and *I* should like to help you to find him."

"Do you know," said the poor gentleman solemnly, "I am not so very much surprised he ran away from the solicitor, for he is an awful-looking person, and even I felt timid in his

presence. And *you* offer to assist my search? Nay, then, I *must* succeed! Sometimes in the night, when I lie awake, thinking of the Cheffinger estates, I have seemed to hear a sweet voice encouraging me; and now that I hear yours, and become familiar with it, I believe you, Princess, must have been that good and tender genius!"

"It is kind of you to say this, although rather like a fairy tale; and, somehow, *you* do not seem like the people hurrying to and fro in the world who passed me this evening. I should think you could be very kind, if you had some one to love and to love you. I wish Willie Arden was here to talk with us!"

"Many are coming. As I walked along the streets, men whispered, 'We are going to stand by Sir Dickson Cheffinger's house, to see the company arrive. There is a grand reception to-night, and Royalty is expected!' And when passing some of the great Club Houses at Bethnal Green, I heard one Lord say to another, 'Can't stop, old fellow; off to Cheffinger's,—some awfully nice people there to-night!" And another said, "The moke is in the barry; slope it!'—Club terms these gentlemen of fashion use one to another. And they are coming,—all coming,—and we shall be busy as bees! I get so excited when James is not here to announce them, and they crowd in so I can scarcely greet them fast enough; but they are very good, and make no noise, and will be extra decorous to-night, your highness being here. Hush! They are coming! Listen to the trail of those court robes, the soft fall of slippers on my stairs!" He started up, placing his hand to his ear, and listening with painful eagerness. "The carriages are dashing up, whole lines of them. Hark to the coachmen! Where are the police, that this quibbling and quarrelling should take place before Sir Dickson Cheffinger's?"

He was no longer bent, no longer the careworn, troubled creature she had seen; but erect as one of the nobles of that Court the *Grand Monarque* rendered proverbial for its elegance. He opened the door with dignity, and received noble compatriots with grace, leading each haughty aristocrat to the footstool of the Princess, and bowing low before each

beauteous dame, to avoid treading upon whose costly train he would skip for half a yard. To Lena, who saw nothing but the miserable untidiness of the dirty, musty chamber, and the courteous gentleman exercising himself in this fantastic fashion, it was an exhibition that would have moved her to tears, had she not foreseen that such a course would make him more miserable than herself. She, therefore, bowed in return to each imaginary personage, and acknowledged the pretended homage of the noble guests with as great suavity as though to the manner born. It lasted for, perhaps, half an hour, when Sir Dickson, standing upon the landing, called out, "Close the entrance-doors; our chambers are thronged, we can receive no other guests without serious inconvenience. Place their cards upon the salver in the hall, and convey our thanks for the honour done us."

Below, a poor seamstress at her work, stopped her sewing-machine to listen. No smile or coarse unfeeling word came of it, but a shade of pity, as she thought, perchance, of her father, whose brain, overtaxed by work and worry, had failed him, when money was sorely needed in the house to fight the wolf at the door.

And a man with pallid cheek, and a fearful lustre in his sunken eyes, writing, with aching head and heavy heart, heard the call and murmured, "It's the poor mad gentleman up-stairs, but he is happier far than I!"

And a widow painting illuminated ball and dinner programmes, heard with a ghastly smile, and thought it the proper accompaniment to her present labour. And the landlady also heard him and sipped her gin with a chuckle, for, being weak in the head, she had taxed him heavily for the few comforts he enjoyed. And down in the horrid depths the timorous maid heard and shivered and shrank, looking under the sink and in the coal-hole, and vowing to acquaint her lover, the butcher-lad, that she was not going to remain "in a house as was haunted."

Sir Dickson went into his room again, hurriedly spread a newspaper upon the table, brought from the spider's happy hunting-ground three plates, each piled with cold scraps, the

remains of former banquets, and an old cracked tea-pot of that autumnal-tinted ware more remarkable for its cheapness than its elegance. This utensil contained cold tea—the landlady letting her fire out at five o'clock, the poor gentleman was compelled to make him sufficient, before starting upon his travels, to supply him upon his return. It was sorry hardship coming back to such cold and cheerless fare, and sorely he felt it, for he was not so far gone as that; he was exceedingly sensitive, and suffered in proportion; still he endeavoured to make light of it, set somebody of note opposite to him, poured out the quantity that would be taken by the most elegant of little services, handed the three huge cups with dainty gallantry, and sipped his tea with exquisite relish, running on all the time with delicious unconcern upon the family histories of first one and then another of those noble guests met together at his board.

To have refused a cup of tea would have been to seriously wound Sir Dickson's *amour-propre*. Lena graciously accepted the horrible mixture, unabashed by the stern military gaze of the Duke of Cambridge supposed to be sitting opposite. Sir Dickson, busy with his scraps, apportioned them with the utmost ceremony, and applied some of the most high-sounding names Lena had ever heard given to provisions in her life.

Like all fashionable little teas, this was not prolonged to the wearisome time natural to common-folk, and Sir Dickson Cheffinger cleared away. It would be interesting to know where the fine line was drawn, but it is certain that after he had washed up in the toilet-basin not one of the noble guests remained, and he seated himself at the table with as commonplace an air as any mechanic in her Majesty's dominions. Leaning head on hand, he was for a time lost in thought, then looked up at the tired little face before him. All its classical perfection and slight shadowing of haughtiness vanished before the fatigue and exhaustion of this sudden interruption of the quiet, uneventful life. Then Sir Dickson said with solicitude,—

"I am thinking where to accommodate your highness. I have no apartment disengaged, and I know the hotel to be

full; there is no other way than to ask your acceptance of this chamber."

"And you—what will you do, Sir Dickson?"

"Take my fitting post, your highness, without your chamber!"

"You mean you will sleep on the mat?"

"Where the mat ought to be," he corrected her; adding simply, "Ay, I will sleep there, or like the true knight you would wish there, will watch until the dawn. Some of my guests walk in their sleep, I think; there is great noise sometimes in the silent hours."

"No, Sir Dickson," said she, firmly; "you shall help me to find some comfortable lodging. I will never turn you out of your own room thus; nay, no remonstrance, as our liege knight your first duty is obedience."

He bowed low and accompanied her silently down the dirty stairs, into the quiet street, crossing one of more pretentious appearance, where two rows of lofty houses scowled and showed their teeth all through the night. Then passing along a broad thoroughfare where hotels flaunted rows of lights and bore singular names upon their portals, they wandered into a disreputable quarter, where the houses of entertainment were rented by low and unprincipled French. One innocent as the other, and neither aware how near peril one may be in London.

"Sir Dickson," the girl thought well to say, "it will be best not to acquaint the people with our rank!"

He, therefore, accosted a closely shorn individual upon the steps of one of these hotels, and simply inquired if a bed-chamber could be had for a lady. The shorn one lazily dragged his bulk the length of a passage, where a glass partition sliding aside at his bidding disclosed a wrinkled face, daubed with paint, and encircled with a garland of poppies. Having conducted the two thus far, the shorn one left them and returned to the portals. The lady of the poppies bobbed and waited, the gentleman explained; the lady of the poppies demanded "*cinq chelin.*" The gentleman informed his young charge that he thought five shillings were required, and he had left his purse in the escritoire, when Lena at once produced her

own, and paid the requisition. The lady with the garland rang, and a maid of brazen attractions glided up to them, bearing a brass candlestick. Standing upon a stair, Lena gave her hand to Sir Dickson, who touched it ever so lightly, ever so reverently, and watched wistfully the retreating figure of the spirit that had stolen upon his story like a ray of sunlight.

"Be with you in the morning," she called down to him, where he stood bareheaded, loyal to the last.

Then he walked slowly away, a little mystified by it all, but still somewhat cheered and encouraged. Back to that dull lodging,—it did seem dull now, and he could not people it; he sat down thinking too much of her: and from that he thought of his errand, and of the progress they were to make together.

Lena's guide paused at a door numbered 23, and entered; then courtesying, placed the candlestick upon the table. Supposing it for recompense, the child satisfied her and was left alone. She locked the door, looked under the bed, in the cupboard, and behind the table; and having done this felt tolerably safe, then, throwing herself, just as she was, upon the bed, tired out and sleepy, with a fond last thought of St. Aubyn, and a "Good night, dear," spoken as usual, passed off to sleep. She slept for an hour or more, when the noise of quarrelling awoke her; there were rough words interchanged in an unknown tongue, shuffling of feet, and echoing of heavy blows. Thoroughly alarmed, the child sprang from the bed; without a candle, there was yet sufficient light proceeding from the street to define the interior of her room, and she made for the door without an instant's hesitation. The combatants were in the adjoining apartment: and the partition seemed to be nothing but lath and paper, and the child expected each moment to see one or other of the struggling brawlers come crashing through. The conflict raged yet fiercer, and Lena, to whom this, one of the delights of social intercourse, was foreign as the disputants, could endure it no longer, but fled down-stairs, and out at the door, to the great astonishment of the shorn one who was closing for the night.

She hastened from the quarter altogether: the din of that discordant warfare fell rudely upon the ears attuned all life long to such different sounds.

She knew not which turning to take, but tried to find the way they had come; she felt she would be more safe near him. Alas! streets were so much alike, and she was so ignorant of the locality, it was impossible to retrace her way; he had not told her the name of the street or house, nor had she, in the busy press of other thoughts, asked the important question. When morning came it would be as bad; how would she find her friend again in all that maze of streets? The tears started to her eyes as she saw the shutters closing in each lighted home, and heard bolts drawn sharp as if to keep all such forlorn ones out in the chilly streets. Who now will help the one ewe lamb, all day watched over? Could St. Aubyn, who loved this helpless innocent, but look upon her now, wandering amidst the homeless as homeless as any!

She could not find the street, or discover any one to whom she could tell her tale; all looked so unpitying, or so wretched.

Before her, in the gaslight, was a hoarding gay with coloured pictures and huge letters; she did not understand them, any more than she understood why the child, shoeless and unkempt, stood below there selling cigar-lights at a half-penny. Every fresh poster displayed in the Metropolis is criticized with an amount of interest by the vulgar equal to that aroused amongst the refined by the Academy. The walls and hoardings are the Art galleries of the poor; the beggar, tired of tramping the bare bleak tracts beyond the City walls, hails sight of these, and feasts eyes upon their show of colour. And this pale traveller, so suddenly aroused from slumbering away her fatigue, stood below there, gazing up with wonderment, whilst the houses closed, and she was all uncertain which way to turn. Her lips were pressed close with a sort of desperate sadness, a despairing longing to be back at home. And the heart was heavier than the God of the outcast deemed well; for a poor man, upon his way home, spare, uncomely, stooped over her with a chivalry that refined all the roughness, and made him every inch a gentleman. Was she ill, or had

she lost some one? Too honest to acknowledge the one, too timid to admit the other, she only shook her head, leaning upon the hand-rail before the hoarding; and he went on his way regretfully.

What clatter of vehicles and rude jostling of the passers-by! how heartily she wished herself away, even upon that quiet Yorkshire road of the morning, when the good wife's kindly welcome to her wooden bench seemed, from this noisy distance, of a wondrous sweetness. Truly she would not want to see the world again for some time to come!

These brown, dingy lines of houses, and frowning fronts of dreary streets, were chilling and painful, holding out no welcome; nay, repelling from the very door-steps.

A woman, passing with an infant, noticed the pale, frightened look of the girl, and with great kindness inquired if she had lost her way? And Lena answered her "No," thanking her warmly, however, for the kind tone touched a tenderer chord. "It's little enough I've done, goodness knows," the woman said with feeling; "if we're not kind to one another at this time o' night, I'd like to know when we could be? But some people are kindest when there's lots o' sunshine, they seem to need that to draw it out on 'em!" And she, too, walked on, and the child was again alone. The woman had recalled her own youth, her own coming up to London, and, before that life began, at a pretty cottage far away, a sweet home broken up; she remembered the ivy, thick on the walls, and the wild-rose forest at the rear, the lavender-trees below the windows, and the clematis bower at the porch—the mossy tiles with embroidery of lichens all the sloping length; the shady elm by the well near the apple-grove, and the holly hedges thick all the snow time with garniture of Winter's jewels. This fair young face had called back that picture as a face sometimes will, and when the woman went on her way still thinking, it was like leaving the glad old time behind.

And Lena stood wondering why these people spoke to her, not knowing how impressive her beauty was—how visible her innocence; strange and uncommon, doubtless, both of them, at all events by midnight lights.

Walking on, she came to the stone pillars of a building, imposing by reason of its spacious architecture; the poor, sitting about, made room with the native fellowship of the outcast. One old woman ventured to touch with her horny hand the ravelled skeins of auburn hair; it was something of a revelation to the decrepit dame, and over the next pinch of snuff she wondered what order of being this was. Were the flesh, and the blood, and the skin, and the limbs, of another mould? And she thought the preacher once heard at a crossing where three ways met, had not told them quite the truth when he said that we all were one. Then a brusque sailor looked aslant upon the pretty face of the fair wanderer, and thought of the long journey from the Docks, over leagues of land and water, where none like this were found, but where drear snow met waves as white, and died upon their passionate bosoms; and that he'd go the safer and better for a kiss from the mouth like a wreath of flowers. And an old Jew broker passing, one used to dangling gems for cursory appraisement, catching the ravishing glitter in the large eyes, took a quiet oath by his Patriarch that no diamond had ever flashed like these.

To Lena, who had more than the average share of poetry in her composition, this night scene was the most wonderful she had witnessed. It contrasted so strikingly with the grand silent nights upon the cliff, where the only music had been hoarse rumbling of the German Ocean, and the only lights the stately stars, or the tapers the Master had lighted on dark nights of storm, until the windows were aglow and the mansion became the beacon of that coast.

This was as new to her as the dainty device of the playwright to the child who visits pantomime for the first time, and sits enchanted before that triumph of artists. This also was a fairy realm, although the grotesque side of it. True, it was not the season when the English *infra dignitatem* coldness thaws to the warmth of chandelier and sunlight, and the crowd of rosy faces; when the white-haired guardian of some boisterous troop surrenders with compliant grace to the mirth of the buffoonery, and with splendid companionship becomes even as one of their years; such have a charm that is all and

entirely their own, more manifest to the children some thirty years ahead, when not all their winning ways nor all their grateful memories will replace lost faces, or make the circle of home again complete. Not the season when the huge doors before which she is now resting, are open, while a throng of little ones pass to the carriages, when white-gloved hands grasp the programme as though clinging to a shred of their Elysium, and red or white hoods cover up the golden tresses, so that such as this poor child see only a straggling curl or two. Then there are peeps of blush-rose throats, with a cross of diamonds or locket of chased gold with pearls, and young gallants who look all lovingly to the care of their sweet girl-charges; but it was all very dead and gloomy just now, with the lamp-light wind-blown and flickering, and these destitute ones cowering; it was all a masquerade thus far, this experience of the City's night side. Considering the surroundings, nothing could well be more strange to her. That great edifice rearing like a mausoleum, the pillars casting sullen shadows vault-like and chill, where the ghouls of ancient memory hunting grim echoes of tragedy, still haunted the area. The glamour of the lights, itinerant venders taking up their stand for the night, like wizards by unholy fires; houseless Bohemians idling past the building with a shiver, thinking of the workhouse or the gaol; dog starvelings that came to her side with a pitiful look, lean horses plodding home, children from reeking courts, who found more shelter beneath the pillars of old Drury than where their drunken kin caroused and fought; women, like shadows—bodiless, soulless, only the tormented spirit left urging them to the black and ghastly stream. All strange, most strange! She moved away from the place.

Opposite to her was a shop still open, with stale cakes, dry buns, dirty sweetmeats, and chocolate in the window; she entered, and a loathsome rabble hailed her with yells of delight. She stood by the counter where an unclean Italian was spooning pink and yellow garbage from a can. "Lemon, or strawberry-cream?" he asked; she did not understand, but inquired if she might stop there for the night, a question that stirred the rabble to wilder merriment: springing to their feet, they

were as a gang of fiends released—seizing the shrinking girl, they dragged her to the inner room—a place of nameless abominations. But here the spirit Lena had inherited from her father and mother, and of which we have caught an inkling before, stood her in good stead: for, with all her ignorance of things and innocence of wrong, she possessed an innate dignity that at times flamed savagely as a red-skin's; and now, doubling her fist, she laid about her vigorously and released herself from the assailants, before they had recovered their surprise at her spirit. Like most frequenting these dens they were young, but none the less malicious in a posse, and she retreated before the fierce retaliation that seemed imminent. Fortunately a police-officer was near by, and he at once ordered the dealer to close for the night. Lena, taking advantage of the circumstance, stole down the quietest street at hand; it was Wellington Street; and thence, by Tavistock and Southampton Streets, she came into Covent Garden.

CHAPTER XXX.

COVENT GARDEN.

She has wandered into Covent Garden, and here will pass the night; for it is quieter, and there is a something about it, even at this hour, reminding her of the pleasant country ways.

She feels this, not knowing that here upon this one pastoral bit of the Metropolis is to be seen the pageant of life at a glance; that here is life, real life; taking the revolution of hours. Buds and blossoms, wild and hot-house flowers, fresh and faded. Here are characters curious and quaint! Some of the hardy sort and sturdy; some of quiet ways and by-paths; some of sunless tracts, narrow alley growth, fungi of dim courts and the waste; some of gas life, forced; some dried, between the leaves of trouble-days; some with poem life, fold within fold; others nursing sweet life soft as the thistle's down; some rough and rugged, others like sunshine making light of all things: verily here is life, a whole procession of the race to pass before the child, going this round of Covent Garden.

Midnight tolls from the church of St. Paul, west of the Market, with its Tuscan portico; which between the starlight and the gaslight flickers to a weird archness the fantastic Inigo himself never dreamt of. This front of the ancient fane is classical; upon hustings beneath its shadow Fox harangued; Beau Sheridan's wit flashed brilliantly; and Burdett thrilled the Garden. And this silent plot, this grave-tract girt by walls, which it seems even London's din cannot disturb,

bears ashes of the Arts. Here lies Macklin; near him Wycherley, the dramatist of Charles's day, the friend of courtly Rochester, and the Duchess of Cleveland's especial laureate of the boudoir; here they brought Lely, the canvas chronicler of the Stuart harem; Gibbons, whose flowers in many a palace wreathe garden-garlands in yet fragrant wood; Butler, whose Hudibras seems to grin from between the old stakes mockingly on the age of paler satire; Walcot, the after-wit, whose barbed spleen became a terror; and other bones, and London dust of many as great, as good, although not embalmed. The moving shadowy outcast ones there by the darkest line of wall, recall the grim old sinners of the Death Dance pageant, wandering round to set to partners; it is not so, but these would give their all—their rattling frames and ragged binding—to lay them low in that quiet grave-yard. See the long lank fingers clutching on the stone, the iron (to steady, you say, thinking it intoxication); but the action comes of pain, that grows of grief, that is born of wrong; and they look up at the old church cursingly. The great calm thing mocks, jeeringly; it has seen the peoples pass and the world grow grey; you would think it would topple, pitifully, at witness of the saddened lives that haunt with spectral regularity its precincts. Tush! When has the Sphinx dropped tears for all the Nubian misery that has crouched beneath its shadow? The poor of the lands, and the cities of the lands, learn first, learn last, that stone is stone.

That? A haggard and white little face, looking up with a terrible sadness; the limbs uncared for from the birth, all the life a moan, and it shrinks here, and when the stars come forth singles one, ever the same, 'tis the only love it knows from dawn to eve of every year; and when stars too are hidden, buries face in knees bewailing with quiet grim anguish. No Garden of Eden this to such worn folk. There is no need to pass between it and the star-line, breaking the one ray ever entering that soul, and—be careful of that basket of pompons; they are not fresh; drabbled indeed, by weary trailing in the rear of purse-strings, but they represent a stock in trade, and so are worthy of respect, we think so much of

trade! Little fingers will adjust the leaves and blossoms, and try to earn a breakfast yet within the Garden.

Boom, or clang, which? 'Tis discordancy anyhow! It means the FIRST hour's life has broken upon the City of the Thames!

Not much stirring yet, however. A policeman with imposing step awakes the echoes about the piazza, and misery lifts an ear, ever alert, raises a grimy face, and peers lynx-like; then, while the stalwart figure emerges round the corner, and the starlight shines on the white buttons, the classic helmet, and the bronzed face, the hunted start from the ground, from behind the baskets, from portico and doorway, and glide off with shuffling steps, and sneaking looks aslant at the law under shadow of the church.

A boy is seen stealthily making for John, Duke of Bedford's Market-house; he disappears behind the sacks, and looking about discovers an empty one, into which he creeps and lies down, pillowing his head upon the wheelbarrow; he remains perfectly still, and will soon be asleep, for he has been on the tramp all day, and they are disturbed at an early hour in Covent Garden. Painters have no need to go to Italy for studies! Examine nearer home; one often falls athwart a piece of beauty as striking in this City, as anything found in Rome. This boy for instance, what finer head can be desired? The contour is symmetry itself; below the matted curls the brow is broad as the white splendour of your own darling's, of which you think so much as you hold the little one towards you, and proudly lift it on your knee. It is a Little King, with all the intellectuality of the ancients, and girt in purple and fine linen of the moderns. And this! A beggar beauty scarce worthy your regard. Years since there was a man of Florence who daubed gaudily grand studies, making a name as canvas names are held; his *atelier* became the rage, and men and women crowded it, eager for each new face; and it was rumoured he had been for long engaged upon a grand boy head, for a study he called the "Eldest born of Cain;" and when after long months this was bared to eyes of critics and disciples, such a head was seen as no poet

dared conceive. "It is a grand conception!" they said. He turned with a sad smile from his picture. "I tried to make it so, for the son of Cain; but failed miserably, and had to fall back again upon the alleys of our City. It is a life copy, that is all!" And this old City of London is full of such, but we allow the rags and the dirt to prejudice. That highly popular bulb the hyacinth, passes through some such stage, and it is certain the lily is nowhere as beautiful as in the mossy mould of its own wild woodland valley.

Take now the south-east angle. That sober-looking old block is the Hummums, one of the super-genteel hotels of London. The young man rolling past cannot be going there; he is tall, and of the sporting variety; a crimson satin tie, and bulky watch-chain, a cut-away coat, and slight cane with dog-head top, are the properties; he singeth, but the rhythm is irregular; he jolts his low-crowned hat all upon the skew, and leers and winks at the stars, as though they were bar-maids; he flutters and waves a handkerchief, heavy with per-fume of the jockey-club; he encircles a lamp-post with his arm while inquiring the way to the central arcade, as he thinks he will buy a bouquet; he stumbles over baskets, and swears they are drunk, tells a post in confidence that he has been to the Alhambra, and wants to finish up the night at Evans's; he picks up a cabbage-stalk after various ineffectual attempts, and fixes it jauntily in his button-hole, vaguely defining the thing as a "cam-came-melia!" An old woman, crooning over a chestnut-brazier, watches the progress of this young man with a grim sort of philosophy.

One—Two! Hark, how the clocks catch the ripple, and echo back—St. Bride's, St. Dunstan's, St. Mary's, St. Clement Danes, St. Anne's, St. Martin's, the Temple, and the Chapel Royal,—all the cordon of steeple and tower.

Odd-looking loungers are seen here and there, near the entrance to the Opera House, and we wonder what on earth they are doing! They are divisible. Stand by this pillar—not as though watching, for they are queer customers, and all the holy folk that walked the garden when St. Peter's Convent stood hereon could not save us from an ugly thrust if they

suspected espionage. Observe those ruffianly fellows with the shaggy heads and piercing eyes; they are scrutinizing every flag for flotsam and jetsam; there are rich finds here sometimes. Those leaning against the stonework do a melancholy prowl between this range and Bow Street, always near the theatre; they love it; if they can pick up a job that takes them away, they return to it. Paupers, this bound is home! Houseless, the great building is their haven! Shreds of programme telling of lyric drama, and mighty names taking part therein, are treasures when never a morsel has been near the lips for long hours. All day they are hanging about; at evening they watch the army of musicians enter, sometimes touching with more than reverent hand a violin-case as the men brush past; then to the *artistes'* entrance, holding in their opinion, the close carriages greater than the Romans held the chariots of Trajan; and looking on the black-moustached ones as beings of a superior order, while the scarlet-cloaked grand-dames rank higher than the *noblesse,* who follow next in order of the watching. Why? We cannot tell! These loungers may be broken-hearted, disappointed ones, whose altar is strewn with the shattered dreams of a strong ambition that was, perchance, this great house, and the great twined art it represents. Enough that they are the outcast of the nomads that hang about the part—English, German, or Italian—enough that they are not as the refuse are, haunting other tracts; and that they possess the intelligence arising of culture, and in this are poorer than the poorest, more wretched than the wretchedest. And yet another! Notice the old grey-haired, scantily-clothed one, crouching, sitting, leaning back to the stone as though it were his last friend; where is the son's strong arm, the daughter's regardful care, that these aged limbs are here this chilly autumn tide? What are the men and women who sleep on down thinking of, that such poor old mortals are left to repose with this cruel comfort?

Come away, and take a turn with more distinguished company in Russell Street. Here stood the coffee-houses of the *Tatler,* "Tom's," "Will's," and "Button's." Here Johnson

strolled with Garrick, and in yonder house, or thereabouts, Addison and Steele revised the *Spectator* proofs.

> Here Goldsmith borrow'd half-a-crown,
> There Colman stoop'd to write it down,

And so on, although it is doubtful if the good people whose names are in everybody's mouth performed the nice detail legend ascribes.

A cab rolls past piled high with luggage, probably from some terminus. One of the fascinating sensations of life, arrival by rail at 2·50 a.m! Or is it some secret case of removal in the grey still hours? We remark the wan face by the window! Only an effect of this ghastly light, perhaps. We also remark a child asleep upon the woman's knee; when ours are warm in bed. These London cabs often bear big sorrows, take the year round. It has stopped at a private hotel in the Garden; the man rings; all is grey, the dingy front and dead cold windows look horribly unwelcoming; he rings again. Everything is silent as the grave; evidently a house where no night porter is retained, or else the man is sleeping. The lady's head clad in mourning-gear is seen by the unearthly light, and her face is anxious-looking and very pale. She instructs him to try elsewhere, and the man blunders impatiently to his horse's head, and leads the tired animal across the space to where a light burns all night, and a porter dozes in a great black chair.

A dog turns over the cabbage leaves and other refuse remaining to the Garden scavengers. These are of four kinds: the dogs—a wonderful race; the poor—who make many a savoury life-sustaining dish from these findings; the outcast children—who, like the animals, take it in the raw and nibble voraciously at the second great kingdom; and the official gentlemen of the Market, who, with dredge and drag, and shovel and cart, clear the way for her Majesty's tradesmen.

Clock strikes One—Two—Three, and the dog barks; the Covent Garden dogs divide the time by barking at the clock and running round the Market.

A man wheels a curious machine into the square, it is upon wheels and it steameth; it is a contrivance of tin, and it beareth inscript, HOT COFFEE, PIES, AND SAUSAGES. There is a small cupboard attached, and it containeth crockery; from this, having planted his apparatus, the man produces cups and saucers; they are of solid ware and make pottery-music that might almost be heard at the other end of the hushed and echoing Market. A pause, then the man strikes his chest after the warming method, ties on a semi-white apron, pokes at a little fire subterranean to the tin works, and plunges a fork into a pan, raising a pallid-looking sausage, which he eyes with the anxious scrutiny of a connoisseur and professional cook. The representative dog smells the odour of that sausage, and its fellows, and comes sneaking round the corner of the tin, the proprietor of which administers a vigorous corrective, and rubs the covers of his suite with an old rag kept for that purpose. Two men come in sight, workmen, printers apparently, they stop by the early morning stall and breakfast. A policeman tramps past and greets the old fellow of the buffet: then come a couple of girls, young but not fair, and looking very like having been out all night; maybe there are reasons. One begs a cup of coffee for the two, solemnly promising to pay another time; they have been locked out, she explains, and are half dead with weariness and hunger. Over the way another stall is making a stand; merchant No. 1 indicates his rival, opposite, as of more benevolent tendencies, and returns the dregs from the last customer's cup back to the can; whereon the lady who hath not spoken, indulges in a volley of oaths directed at this merchant, his can, and his coffee. Acclimatized, he only smiles satirically, and winks to the Market clock, which just then goes the quarter.

Rumbling of wheels is heard, and presently a waggon laden high with baskets, secured by ropes and covered with a species of tarpaulin, turns into the quadrangle; the team is not high-mettled, and the whip and reins hang listlessly in the waggoner's hands. Under the influence of rum or slumber the man does not arouse until a sharp shout is heard, and the custodian or officer of the Garden starts out from some mysterious

recess; when he awakes, after a long journey from sweet tracts of field and garden land, the most profitable of all garden land, the market-garden. And now, from the rear of the edifice, tumbles one of the porter breed, and between the two the unlading is accomplished, and the freightage spread in orderly divisions upon the pavement. There is a toll on each waggon of vegetable produce, and on each ton of potatoes, which helps to swell the revenues of the Market; and the custodian jots down memoranda in an official-looking book.

The first column of smoke now winds upwards from one of the early-stirring hotels, over Southampton-street way; and, Strandwards, the gradual extension of hubbub creeps upon the ear, rising, spreading, with the sonance of advancing waves; stealing upon one with a strength of increase that is almost majestic, every minute adding to it; until, as One—Two—Three — FOUR strikes, we flush to the voiceful company of London traffic. Waggons and vans, carts, trucks, and even barrows, now begin to arrive in quick succession, and the bustle of the day commences; queer men in aprons and fur caps, rough England bound in corduroy; brawny women with great baskets weighted and overweighted by roots; girls, handkerchiefs tied around heads, with bundles of herbs; master-gardeners early to the mart, spick and span with clean collars; old fogies with odd botany samples, which one would suppose were never uprooted from the soil of this planet; strong, rosy-cheeked lads from the villages, where the bits of garden behind the cottages provide for the pig and the family; little girls with bundles of flowers, fair as themselves, and looking none the worse for such early rising; damsels from the watercress beds with the produce of whole reaches; and sturdy, honest-looking sons of the soil loaded with all the choice fruits in season. Carefully nailed and strawed boxes packed with layer upon layer of sweet things in foreign fruit, and others all jewel-like, precious in snowy wool. A small army of costers, nurserymen in every variety, proprietors of monster graperies, proud growers of prize roses, and artists in melons and pumpkins. The man who considers Kew an imposition and swears he can grow sturdier firs than Norway; the other man who delights in fancy

names for his apples, and has a pear called after every notability in Europe. Here is the gardener's daughter casting sheep's eyes at all the young Colins of the Market, and the old woman so extravagantly cross because the favourite public-house at the corner is late in opening its shutters. One or two out-door lamps are still alight, struggling desperately with the streaks of colour stealing up from over Shoreditch and Bethnal Green (the poor receive the sun first sometimes); and in the kitchens and over doorways of houses lights are kindling, and a hurried meal is preparing for those, who, with bag and portmanteau, may have to catch the early trains. From an hotel a page runs to the nearest cab-rank; he rubs his eyes sleepily as though scarce awake; his hair is tangled and unkempt, jacket loose, and cap awry: he rides back with the driver, who indulges in a chilly sort of chaff; the hotel door opens and the "boots" brings forth a trunk, which he and the cabman throw on the vehicle as if to knock the bottom out; and they indulge in by-play of a facetious order. Presently, a maid with a bonnet-box appears on the steps and mincingly inquires if that clock is right? Cabman, having assured her a policeman sleeps in the works all night to prevent any mistake, she trips upstairs and returns with a basket, a small box, and a brown paper parcel; a cage daintily encased in tissue, pin-punctured; and a very large reticule, which are placed with scrupulous care in the cab, and the door closed; she begs the man to be cautious that the horse does not start, and enters once more, returning after a longer interval with a cat, a foot-warmer, a large flower-pot, a bundle, and some books confined by a strap; these are arranged in the vehicle, the driver viewing the ceremony with an expression altogether indescribable. Having remarked "It is quite cool this morning!" and bestowed a look of ineffable disgust at the driver's sarcastic cast of floridness, the maid again dashes to the reserve, finally returning with a globe of fish; which, in the endeavour to carry steadily while descending the steps, imparts a cross-eyed effect to her beauty, already unprepossessing by any light. An angular being, with grisly ringlets, and wraps beyond enumeration, brings up the rear; she has a venomous-looking

sunshade with which she pokes at the steed, exclaiming, "I hope yer hoss ain't likely to run away, young man!" Some delay occurs in consequence of the lady insisting upon her maid bearing the aquarium upon one knee, the aviary upon the other, and the cat between the two. A lounger drawn to the spot offers to carry the entire cargo for sixpence, but the lady implores the cabman to drive on to Charing Cross. As the cavalcade departs, One—Two—Three—Four—Five! Why, we are getting right into the day of this fragrant and fresh autumnal morn! The Garden hostelries are open or opening, and those of the early business persuasion are in full draw; a motley crew, ranging from salesmen to watercress girls, being crowded at the bars. Cabs in abundance rush up with those for the morning trains or those for the early market, which at this time is open and crowded; and, judging by the noise and shouting, the business done should be something considerable, and so it is, as all the world knows. It is one of the most sweet and glowing places of business! The stalls of Damascus and high places of Bagdad bear no brighter show of colour; all the bazaars of commerce in lands away East, famed over the breadth of the universe for splendour, boast no more gorgeous array of colour. One should come hither, were it not for the commotion, and read Canticles, or Tennyson, or any other lovely nature-lines that cease of poem-utterance only where the tenderer spiritual light beats upon the stanzas.

Not a quarter of an hour since and all this area was deserted, and now a legion flocks Long-acre way, so varied, we well may term it cosmopolitan. Everything is here. Italian mice boys, and they of the plastic art, from old Roman courts more dingy and more wretched even than our London ways, where the swart-skinned most do congregate; here come fellows of the sunny land with glossy curls and eyes with stiletto glitter; lazy outcasts of the workshops of Cremona, hawking curiously carven bouquet-holders; and slight, lithe-handed men of Venice, with models of the Rialto forming vases for coloured grasses. Strong-limbed peasants of Loretto, with fragments of the holy house transported thither from Nazareth by the

angels, relics disposed of to the Faithful about Hatton Garden, London Wall, and other savoury districts; these and many of the Latin, rough as when of days ere Attila and his Huns chased their hill-sides. Here also are squat samples of the Teutonic, old grisly fellows who ran the Hainault woods in boyhood, and plucked daffodil leaves for their sweethearts in the fields of beautiful Brabant; and they are here this morning with their three score and ten epochs of trouble, writ in wrinkles plain as the rings on tree trunks, selling wind-mills and weather-houses; and dreaming this great square, with its mixed crowd and commotion, its ancient work of builder's hands, and Charles Fowler's splendid Market-house, is the old Square of Antwerp, where they barged up the Scheldt to buy posies on their wedding morn. French are here, with curious plants and still more curious terra-cotta; some with last night's newspapers; one with a tray of photographs, where the actresses are at high jinks with staid republicans, and the Pope lies face to face with the last brazen *débutante* of the Scarlet Letter. Here hails one of Picardy, with pine contrivances all feathery with fern; there a handsome lad of the Haute Saône, with a pedlar's wallet and jewellery, old filigree work and Florentine craft, or imitation. Right away by the entrance to the Arcade, stands a red-capped Turk, with a tray of scented pink and yellow packets. He has in his day stalked the Balkan with the most fearless sportsmen of the Servian range; now he has come to tramping London with odd parcels of fragrance, turning up in Covent Garden at 5.45 a.m., and in Bayswater at the corresponding hour in the evening. And yonder is an Arab with rich-hued scarves woven in threads of gold. Plenty of Irish are about the Market,—few Scotch; but of our countrymen, the English, the procession is characteristic to a degree. Take, for instance, the old man sitting on the up-turned baskets. Already he has cleared, and now sits down, sharp, to drink the can of tea his grand-daughter doubtless is preparing, for he must get back to his cottage, or shop with a bit of land. Not far removed from whom, notice the well-dressed man with the ebony cane, a gentleman with a taste for Roses; not in the least prejudiced, but deeming

everything else that grows a mistake. He has a charming bower near Fulham, where he cultivates tea-scented china splendour of deep, rich yellow, or creamy white shaded with salmon; he fills his lozenge-beds with moss-covered triumphs, carmine, all a velvet glow; and lake, almost a black. He pats these on the head, and talks to them like children, and when people visit his house, rubs his hands proudly while standing on the hearth-rug, and says assuringly, "You'll come and look at my roses?" And they go with alacrity, knowing as much about the roses as do the sticks the latter are wedded to. He has a Bourbon of a fiery crimson the Horticultural Society would assassinate him for; and a white queenly bloom he calls the *Impératrice Eugénie*, of which the people next door preserve the petals amongst old letters, and put tempting vases on the window-sill, in the hope that he may occasionally present a specimen or two with his compliments. He is artistic, too, in the arrangement of the flowers about his rooms; places dense purple Provence bloom in snowy vases, and dazzling white noisettes in black stone classic cups, of a school when the Sharon alone decked the tables of porphyry.

The old lady in mourning by those crosses and wreaths of immortelle is often seen at the Garden, but never buys anything else. Her brave son, stricken young, bonnie and winsome, loved these; she decks his portrait with their gentle bloom. The aged have dreams to which the heart, as it grows a degree colder with each silver hair, clings with long love; and she rises with the best, and comes here before work, being only a poor housekeeper in chambers, and timorous every day lest she should be told to go, for her slowness. But now she is off; for there goes One,—Two,—Three,—Four,—Five,—Six. How time flies! Observe the pale, thoughtful-looking gentleman who seems to be buying up all the Market. He is a great physician,—so great he strengthens life amongst the poor; and when the day comes for fee and recompense, mysteriously forgets many such little services. Those flowers will be carried hence by his servant (the carriage waits in Tavistock Street), and taken to wan, invalid, flower-loving ones, to whom they will come as angels' messages. The

cross old gentleman poking into everything with his stick, as though trying consistency of mould, has one weak point, one hobby for which everything else may be neglected, and that—his garden: round this he has phenomenal palings, and a gate of mediæval cast, a gardener specially retained to keep off little boys and slugs, labels on his shrubs which he illuminates in classic characters, and an old man whom he employs to walk round his trees with a lantern during the night. He knows the exact age of the entire family, having bought them all, himself, in the Garden; he has the best things, out Clapton way, to be found under name of Box and Bay, Sumach and Sycamore, Acacia and Almond, Escallonia and Euonymus, Hawthorn and Holly, Magnolia and Myrtle, Olive and Oleander, Laurel and Lilac; while his Rhododendrons, Azaleas, and Kalmias, are famed the suburb over.

The middle-aged man there is on hunt for the most choice *bouquet* of the morning: we will not inquire for whom. Here, is a gentleman's gentleman ordering cut bloom for the table. There, a fashionable *artiste* in *modes*, whose *salon* West is always elegant with flowers, and gilded furniture hired in Southampton Row. There, we see a retail dealer in rockeries and ferneries; he also deals in aviaries and aquaria, window-screens, floral fenders, and other ornamental luxuries. And now observe for a moment the lady and her maid selecting the rustic *epergne*. She is very beautiful, and fastidious; the contrivance must be altered to her taste; this coil of wood twined the reverse way, that gilded branch and chain removed for the plume of maiden-hair fern. The lady is an eminent novelist, with a house like a fairy bower, and the sovereignty of an empress. That stout, white-whiskered man has made a fortune on these flags; he is a wire-merchant; has cordoned the gardens, trellised the lawns, and wired the walls of half the noble landowners in England. The frumpy old lady in spotted alpaca, and a lap full of variegated bulbs, is a general grower of table requisites of the plainer sort. When the old man, her husband, died, there was little to leave save the onion-reaches. People thought, out his way, there'd have been a tidy purse of yellow gold. But no; somehow, there was

garden, and that alone. The old lady took it philosophically, and planted celery, sprouts, broccoli, beet, marrow, kale, and such-like growth; and they thrived together. She is at her post every morning; drives up in that light cart standing third in the line, a journey from beyond Stratford a quarter of a league. The brisk buyer of flower-seeds is a tradesman, with two strong loves; one for his family—a small brood nurserywards; and the other for his garden—above their heads, being on the roof, like many a tradesman's garden in London; where marigold on the leads and mushroom in the cellar form the antipodes of cultivation.

Thus the study of the *genus homo* in Covent Garden is as diversified as a pageant of nations. Lena, ensconced in one of the recesses, had seen it all, save once or twice in the earlier hours, when she had dozed the time away.

As day-light approached, and the bustle we have pictured continued, the scene caught her fancy; she walked from side to side with quick, observant eyes, taking in each feature and scanning all who crossed the market area, hoping to see her friend. She might have waited about, looking for him in the streets, but she had a presentiment some central position, like that where she had taken her station, would be the best. Sir Dickson, upon calling for her at the hotel, and discovering her absence, might suppose there was some good cause; would, no doubt, remember she was uninformed of his address; and would think, perhaps, she had wandered to this place, and there was waiting his knightly attendance. This looked feasible; so she decided to remain there for some time longer, and watch these good people at their work; perhaps, learn more than ever before in her life! Each hour there was a change in those frequenting the Market, each hour some new slide in this phantasmagoria of London life.

CHAPTER XXXI.

FOR FRIEND, COMPANION, AND SISTER.

Lena pondered much whether St. Aubyn had ever seen this place, or passed a night here. What wonders she would have to narrate! Why, she would return with sufficient story for all the winter through. She remembered Mrs. Brandon had spoken of the *bouquets* to be seen in Covent Garden, but she had not met with any of those choice arrangements thus far.

Church bells are heard going for morning service, and soon afterwards Seven falls from the tower of the church near by. Roman Catholic sisters enter, purchase a few white flowers, and move silently away.

Lena would follow the direction of the bells she had heard, and enter the place of devotion, but that she fears Sir Dickson Cheffinger may come and go, and the one chance be lost of recovering her friend. She had no very clear notion of the time it would take her to return, but she intended to set forth upon the journey homewards soon after the meridian of the day. And she would take back such splendid flowers for *him*, to be laid upon his dressing-table—a peace-offering, and love-offering; and she taxed her brain to think of all the pretty schemes she could, likely to charm her kingly poet-guardian; whom she now, indeed, felt she loved as never before. And she resolved, so resolutely, never to vex and grieve him again; crying a few minutes, when she remembered how often she had done so. Lena gave but little time to breakfast, snatching it hastily in the most genteel of the coffee-houses, and then returning to her watch.

Meanwhile shops are opening, and the theatrical ware-

houses disclose the curious contents of their windows; here you may play at nine-pins with the ages, learn more of the nations in five minutes than you have learnt in a life; take a bird's-eye view of history; be introduced to all the celebrities of biography; and encounter such gentry of *diablerie*, as you would not dabble again with, in the occult, this side of the grave. Enter this hotel, the magnificent clock upon the mantel of the *salle* chimes EIGHT, as we cross the threshold; an irritable old gentleman is seated before some cutlets, and appears apprehensive of a forcible removal of the same. There is a sense of enjoyment beneath this hospitable roof, and involuntarily we think of those whom never a roof covers, save such as is afforded by the Garden.

A rubicund and genial country gentleman enters and seats himself opposite to him of the cutlets—to the manifest annoyance of the latter.

"Fine morning!" he pleasantly remarks.

"Don't know! Hav'n't been out! just down!" and he dashes the Worcestershire sauce about recklessly.

"Seen the paper this morning?" the genial one ventures to ask. "Any news?"

"Lies you mean—don't read the papers, got something else to do!"

"What is your opinion of the Session?"

"Didn't know there was one! Don't have opinions! I'm facts, sir, dry and solid, pounds, hundredweights—gallons—skins—dickers—bushels; but facts, sir, always!"

Extraordinary individual this; but in spite of his grimness the other seems amused. The apartment is fairly filled; few ladies in comparison to the attendance of the more hungry sex; a waiter at the door holds it open with great deference, a trail as of silk is heard, then the patter of little feet, and a musical voice speaking endearingly to children; and the doorway frames a picture, fair as that of the Goddess of Morning in the great gallery of the Adriatic; a lady of calm, sweet beauty, enters, holding by either hand a pretty boy and girl; she walks the extent of the *salle* majestic as an empress, seemingly unconscious all eyes are turned upon her;

her own being bent upon her children. At the remote extremity of the room a white-haired elderly gentleman, in faultless morning costume, rises to meet her; shakes hands, kisses the girl, lifts the boy on his knee; and the lady, with the same quiet grace, takes a seat opposite her friend. The saturnine gentleman of the Facts watches from beneath his shaggy brows the proceedings described.

"Very elegant!" suggests his neighbour.

"Bah! Take striplings in, not me. Don't believe in women!"

Now considering neither of the gentlemen could very well be classed under the highly necessary sample of human kind he designated striplings, the point was lost; he would have added something more, but it was not to be; for, as it happened, an individual was leaving at that moment, to whom one of the attendants was handing a hat and umbrella; whereat Mr. Cutlet started up feverishly excited, and made for the umbrella viciously.

"Beg pardon—my umbrella, I think!" Proving otherwise, however, he kindly trotted back to his seat with the characteristic and sweet criticism,—

"Fellow looked so like a rogue, thought to be sure he'd made a mistake!"

The genial gentleman pretended to be absorbed in looking at the valuable prints upon the dingy gold and brown splendour of the walls; at the theatrical and operatic portraits, at the rich but well-worn carpet, and tastefully-painted but smoke-discoloured ceiling, when, a paw fell heavily on his arm, and—

"So you are still looking at that woman!"

"Beg pardon?"

"Seems to have taken your fancy, as she has the other old boy's! Fools! Fools!"

This being extremely rude, he preserved a dignified but wounded silence.

"She's only one of over-the-way lot!" the other continued, pointing to the Opera-house, with an energy that nearly drove his forefinger through his neighbour's right eye.

Then he dropped the mustard goblet into the cruet vacuum with a dull electro thud, eloquent and decisive, and rang for his bill (he called it a statement) and this was brought to him upon a silver salver; the attendant looking curiously suspicious meantime; that poor man had already been tried to excess. Now the genius of the office had made a slight mistake, in fact had imagined the two gentlemen one firm, and placed the repast of both upon the old gentleman's slip; a catastrophe that produced volcanic symptoms; for, rising inflammably, and doing auctioneer business with the carving knife on the table, he denounced that wretched retainer with the outraged vehemence of a Rienzi. The genial gentleman ultimately calmed the storm by settling his share of the small amount.

But to return to the Garden, now bathed in the flood of sunshine, looking quite another place; all the buildings, so grey and gloomy in the night, have caught shade and expression, and those tones the Flemish painters loved. Like an arras of gold the sun lies spread upon the walls; the windows gleam a retinue of burnished shields; and here and there an antique chimney-gable comes into view, lending the harmony of an old-world town. The flowers and the shrubs glow with fresh sweet hues, and look as though they had bloomed specially to be admired, so resplendent do they appear, and so coquettishly enfold their hidden charms. All through London there is fragrance which the sun has drawn of these, and it is as incense laid upon the altar of the City. Hard-lined faces, and features writ with reminiscence of pain, catch the sun-gleams, and the reminder of their dear old country ways; and smiles curl upon wan lips, jewel-like upon the days that are dead. And as the pleasing and animated scene is at its height, One—Two—Nine, clangs forth to call the sluggard exquisites of Western chambers to emerge into the sunshine and the world's fair of flowers.

A small voice invites a by-stander to have his boots blacked? Yes. He is not partial to the curb, but stands, pelican-like, a while, for he looks rather disreputable after a long pilgrimage, and in this japanned age the individual with unpolished leather is very much of a pariah. He addresses the impromptu *valet*,

who scratches at a spat of London mud with a sort of affection, as though almost irreverent to remove it, and looks up with sloe-like eyes all the rough City life cannot rob of their beauty. Terribly *outré*, to see beauty in the eyes of a shoe-black!

"Do you find the Covent Garden beat pretty profitable, my boy?"

"Like every other, varies, sir!" Philosophy.

"What do you average a day?"

"It's more when the big house is full; the chorus gents stop for a shine, going in to r'hearse!" Calculation.

"Still you find the people who come to the Market good customers!"

He shakes his head contemptuously, or disconsolately, it is difficult to tell which.

"The gentlefolks has theirn done afore coming, and the dealers don't have 'em blacked at all!"

Judging from some of the domains we have seen, and pursued the gentle rabbit over, it would be of little avail: our glorious soil possessing, amongst its other virtues, that of sincere attachment. The public, meantime, gazes upon the ceremony with the admirable curiosity customarily bestowed upon those undergoing ordeal by shoe-blacking; the English people have an objection to any enlightened fellow-creature standing upon one leg if he has two to stand upon; and evidently regard the institution as a revival in modification of the classical pillory.

A woman with a brood of half-clad young, singeth for bread; he has no change or he would assist that woman; the stereotyped three half-pence in his pocket, he feels, belongs to the urchin at his feet; labour hath its dues. But then the woman singeth; yes, but he has not engaged the vocalist, and he has the urchin. Covent Garden ethics. It is a very odd thing, whenever we are most disposed to help we never have any change!

The polishing over, he goes on his way ruminating, and turning sharp, discovers the urchin bestowing one of his coins upon the woman. Phenomenon.

But then the London poor are all phenomenon. Did we

not last week see a stern man of the alleys knock down another in a tavern brawl, and then in turn watch a long night-time beside the straw of a sick beggar-girl? Those clad in purple and fine linen may learn of these the sweet union: sympathy, compassion, charity.

By this there are many well-dressed folk about the Garden, and a sprinkling of those whose lines have fallen amongst silver spoons and carriages. These are intent on rich purchases for the conservatory or dining-table; or *bouquets* for the evening, and crests of blossom for the vases, in choice chambers where all the walls are a gleam of mirrored luxury.

And there are others treading the market-way with quick business-like step towards their offices and warehouses; clerks whose only joy is some flower pressed between pages of the ledger, on which they look when all a-weary of the great grim City with its grinding routine; merchants' men from the dark and narrow streets and lanes where baled products rear to the smoke height, men who have some sacred niche, corner, shelf, drawer, ledge, or even cranny between the bales, where they hide the loved *souvenirs* of morning walks that whisper of the youth of the sky that is blue, the air that is fresh, the colours that shame all their dyes, and of the holidays coming with the fall of the year.

And there are pale girls here, neatly dressed and wearing all the appearance of genteel though poor condition; they hurriedly, timidly pass the tiers of bloom, with great longing in eyes whose lustre has died under pressure of work and weariness.

And children come, on their way to school, and drink in visions of field and meadow splendour, of which they have read in books alone; visions that last them all the morning within the dull whitewashed walls.

And the governess fresh from some country vicarage, she comes here with her tiresome train for the reminder by that sweet, faint perfume.

So they pass, each face bringing its own story; each new player upon this wonderful stage a life study of absorbing interest; and TEN is heard quivering on the air, and the broad

glare, which has banished all our Rembrandtism, ushers fresh crowds into the thronged mart until character becomes almost too numerous for specimen, and the space is motley as a patchwork quilt.

Take the central arcade alone for study, and here will be found almost every class and type, leaving out the venders altogether; from the nervous gentleman who is always knocking over the jellies, to the gentleman whose province it is to go about treading upon corns, and the gentleman who gets into fearful states of excitement, and passes a life in tripping over cushions. Of course all these are passionate admirers of flowers, wear them in their button-holes, present them to their lady friends, have no objection, in fact, to go botanizing, but upon such expeditions they tumble into sore straits. And there is the inevitable being who knows everything—there is positively nothing upon earth he does not know; he discourses largely, giving one the pedigree of every bulb, and the dam of every fruit. Then we remark the little old gentleman who keeps twiddling a pocket-handkerchief, and who has so polished at his nose, the stump alone remaineth; he turns up everywhere, a nuisance to everybody; in early days, he saw an experimentalist at a Mechanics' Institution do something with a pocket-handkerchief, and it was so startling—he having lent the handkerchief—it took violent effect upon his mind. And the stout lady is here, whose husband, she now tells people, helped to found the British Museum, to which he bequeathed a case of copper-coloured beetles. She was much put out by that circumstance, not that she wanted the beetles—which she was always afraid of—but that she begrudged the case; she thought they might have been sent to the authorities in a pickle-jar, or some other convenient utensil. The showy conversationalists are here; an attendant couple whom people invite upon the same principle as they do the lady who plays brilliantly upon the piano, and pays for her supper in half a score of bars. And the lank pale man whose craze is chipping about with a small hammer, as though searching for the original rib. And the naturalist who persists in talking about the carnivora until

nervous spinsters creep again. And the gentleman with a library, which he figuratively calls his parliament of thought, and which he has collected on the cheap, from old book-stalls, in dusk hours. The young man who is connected with an Association, and who glides through, as afraid of being seen or suspected of vanity; and the philanthropist who commenced regenerating the race half a century since, and who, finding the soil unfruitful, has now taken to vegetables. And there are the distinguished people one meets at the Horticultural shows and garden-parties of grandees, who hold shares, and delight to be recognized as 'Fellows' of something. And the charming foreign lady with the bend of an empress, and a toilet that would have become any of the smaller courts; she is spoken of rather vaguely as the Marchioness, is known to have a passion for billiards, *eau-de-cologne*, and dozens of grey kid, and is generally a person highly effective at a distance. And a country mayor with keen floral tastes and faint odour of candles, and also a doctor of divinity, with queer ideas upon the celibacy question.

We have been told that one of the leading comedians has caught his most successful eccentricities of study in this place; that it is a favourite resort and saunter of the profession is well known, and few faces are more familiar to the enviable arrangers of the choice *bouquets* which are a feature behind the windows.

We observe that certain of the company, under pretence of turning back to look at the stalls, are in reality watching that graceful lady in the French morning toilette of striped *batiste*, worn with the elegance and fashioned with the care of a brocaded satin robe. It is the heroine of a famous divorce case, that caused a sensation some time ago. With exception of a worn and troubled expression all the cunning of the toilette cannot erase, there is no apparent change from the dressy and distinguished *grande dame* of the London season of her days of triumph; yet she has been subjected to no ordinary ordeal, even of the courts. The boy beside her is her only son, possessing the beauty and intelligence of a race famed for both. She has fought in public ways before the rabble for those

eleven years of love and music, has stood tongue-tied, a gazing-stock for London mobs; has queened it lonely and firmly under all the invective of slander, and has made content with one small suite of rooms, one careful tire-woman, one love of all the world—her treasure whom it came so near to losing; and she can bear all for this, even though friends and fortune have fled, and this place of flowers looks strangely sad. She notices none, looks steadily to its end, or far in her boy's deep eyes, reflecting fairest blues of the array. She comes to please him, and walks the promenade, perhaps seeing none; and yet, sometimes flushing, when the boy's eyes wander off to one or other of the lovely children, to the tumbled locks of some fairy in high places—blown shafts of sunshine that take his admiration—and thinking of the future, she saddens deeper still; but then remembers it is spring-time, season of buds with him, though autumn in the world, and takes his hand tenderly as she would take a cluster of lilies, knowing spring glides on to summer with its blossoms, and summer to the grave and settled splendour of the autumn, when love returns to its parent, if bloomless, magnificent, with the last fruits and the best fruits of its year.

They are not all Londoners here this morning. Covent Garden is one of the favourite walks of our country friends, who enjoy the show as much as if they had no heavily fragrant slips of flowering land encompassing their dwelling; and as though they had not journeyed through flecked meadows and between hills starred with the vagrant blossoms. By road or rail the journey is flower-strewn; leaves may be browning; moss taking on the faint expression of much colour; ferns be drab-feathers in the undergrowth; and brushwood and hedge-row a tangle of points, awaiting the call, to pierce through and to burst to a lace-work of dazzling hue; but the autumn flowers are everywhere—the poor man's flowers, gipsy child's flowers, that come without setting, blown by contrary winds, beaten upon by broad waters, borne by winged messengers from waste woodland aisles, caught on the thick wool of driven flocks, and floated by tiny rivulets to sloping haunts of the kingfisher. And the mind of the girl whose fortunes we

follow turns to the flowery ways by which she has come this long distance from her home; turns to the enclosed garden, that wilderness upon the steep summit of the cliff, where trees grow thick as in African jungles; where the birds come to the crumbs she scatters, and conies troop to her feet. She has tired of this ever-changing scene already; tired of the City she had so longed to see; it seemed useless waiting any longer for the coming of that poor gentleman, who might even at that moment be engaged upon the work which had taken such fixed hold upon his mind; she would go from this Market, go from this City, to where flowers did really grow by the road-side, where the simple cotter's wife would make her more welcome than she could possibly feel alone in this vast Metropolis. No one could love flowers more truly and more fondly than herself, and she could spend all day amongst these; but the day was far advanced, and she could not tell what its hours might hold in store. She could not face one of those huge bewildering railway stations; she would rather walk long miles upon the homeward road, until some small place was reached, where trains stop to take up passengers, and where the officers upon the platform find time to say a civil word, and take a little trouble in helping the helpless. It was this the ewe-lamb said to herself midst of all the bustle and confusion, setting forth with a brave little heart, and the characteristic determination Mrs. Brandon delighted to call by the name of obstinacy.

She must ask the way, and to somewhere; and it seemed the most reasonable thing to ask for the road leading to that last town of importance she had noticed upon the journey. She remembered it was called St. Albans, and, turning to a market-gardener standing near by, she asked if he would kindly tell her the way? He looked compassionately at the questioner, jumping to conclusions instantaneously, as is the custom.

"Going to service may-hap, and got to walk! Well, it's a goodish bit o' ground to cover, and I'd advise ye to jump up into the carrier's wan, my dear!"

"No, thank you," thought Lena, "I've had enough of that

sort of travelling;" then she said, aloud, to her informant, "Cannot I ride some distance—at all events through London?"

"To be sure ye can, in one o' them cabs; shall I hail one for ye?"

"I shall think it very kind of you!"

The man did so willingly enough, and our traveller, blushing finely at her temerity, was soon rushing through London by another, and, as she thought, a pleasanter mode of journeying.

Lena left it very much in the driver's hands where to set her down. She took it as a natural consequence that the train from Yorkshire, having passed through St. Albans, would return the same way, and felt proportionately nearer home; and when, some distance from London, she commenced walking, it was with a delightful sense of freedom and liberty. No crowds were here to frighten her, no maze of bricked-in streets to bewilder until her head ached; no thousand-and-one things to look at all at once; the broad clean road was before her, and a sky blue and promising as that of Hesperia. Her cheeks flushed with the pleasure of the walk, with the resolution to be *so* good upon return; the image of St. Aubyn seemed to make the distance as nothing, and the miles disappeared as before the leaping of the antelope. But all this created the most enjoyable appetite Lena St. Aubyn could remember, and she began to look eagerly for some hostelry, or cottage likely to contain the requisites for dining. With the exception of here and there a villa residence, however, nothing of the kind was to be seen, and to approach one of these with a deliberate admission of hunger was out of the question. She thought it just possible some inn might be hiding its modest sign right or left of the main road, and seeing a boy closing the gate of a turning into a lane, she called to him, with a voice half-bold, half-trembling. The boy looked up, leaning with a sort of languid grace upon the upmost bar; then Lena was thrilled by the eyes that met her own, by the striking face with its beautiful Bohemianism and tender melancholy; and, moved to address him further, she timidly begged

pardon for her rudeness, and was but about asking, would he tell her, where—where. She really could not confess to that splendid boy, it was merely a case of dinner, for the desire had vanished; she could only think of that haunting face before her. And the other was as strangely moved. Here was the being shaped of dreams and shreds of poesy, this the face ideal and shadowy, and longed for all life through; the face for friend, for companion, and for sister.

And 'Walter Gordon' opened the gate with an inviting movement, reassuring, and very winning, and said,—

"The house of my friend is here; I am sure you are welcome to sit down and rest. I have known what it is to be tired and faint myself."

Then Lena looked at him more closely, while gratefully following, and thought how like he was to the description Sir Dickson had given of the boy for whom he was searching.

CHAPTER XXXII.

DELICATE CRITICISM.

A CHARACTERISTIC group, consisting of several important members of Society, was assembled round the tea-board of the hospitable Charlotte Caddie, Spinster.

Miss Caddie's papa had been a merchant in tea-boards, trinket-chests, card-trays, screens, and the other things supposed to be imported from that interesting land Japan, inclusive of the fascinating-featured dolls; and the merchant bequeathed the wealth, realized after some years at it, to his daughter, a somewhat gaunt personage of sharp features and keen little eyes that bespoke business tact.

The gaunt but grateful Lottie's residence was her own property; that residence was very comfortably furnished; there was a large chest full of linen, not yet marked, and a basket full of silver, not yet engraved, at least it was hinted so, indirectly, now and then.

Miss Caddie made herself very agreeable. All the sweets of everywhere seemed massed in that bony frame. Miss Caddie was intensely sensible, would talk of science or philosophy, of religion, needlework, or cooking, and was altogether an eminently practical person, a small eater, a sweet vocalist, and an utter stranger to the headache.

Seated next to Miss Caddie was her bosom friend, Kitty Ticklewich, Spinster.

Miss Ticklewich, some years older than her friend, presented a more playful surface to Society, and assumed a juvenile and artless winsomeness, seeking to woo prepossession by the guileless vivacity of her manner. Miss Ticklewich

appeared in black or dark-green silk, in consequence of having sand-coloured hair. The papa of Miss Kitty Ticklewich was a saddle-maker, a gentleman of the jocular school, with slightly horsey tendencies. He used to tell his friends he knew he was not a gentleman, but he felt very contented as he was; a sentiment so aptly expressing his character and principles, it cannot be improved upon. It was known the saddle-maker was very well off, and that Mistress Kitty was provided for; but somehow the young lady had so caught the hue and flavour of the useful commodity in which the saddler principally dealt, that she was still Miss Ticklewich, and promised so to remain. And there was great sympathy between these bosom friends.

Upon the other side of Miss Caddie was another bosom friend, and the bosom friend of these two. This was Merino Bobbin, Spinster.

Miss Bobbin, albeit some decades in advance of the other two so far as age was concerned, pleaded an ignorance of the ways of the world the others did not pretend to. Each progressive year saw Miss Bobbin more simply unconscious and more eager to be taught; there was a confiding dependence upon stronger ones, a plaintive leaning towards the robust and valiant. "Oh, that I had some one to protect me!" was her constant thought, and at times, in spite of all her efforts to conceal it, it was forced by her emotion into half-timid utterance, although what she wished to be protected from never became plainly apparent. Miss Bobbin's papa had been a linendraper, and at that gentle trade he had contrived to amass a fortune, a large fortune as competition-times went, a cheaper man having had the impudence to open under his very nose. Bobbin did not like it, for the establishment had been noted half a century for Fourpenny Calico; and for an upstart to ticket the same thing $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ so shocked the head of the firm that he never rallied, but passed quietly from the counter and the world at the earliest opportunity: the British Tradesman being constituted by nature to bear so much and no more. Mr. Bobbin was a self-made man; for, as he said, he made the business and the business made him; and after this self-made

man had become a ghost, all the discoloured mourning upon the premises was—in accordance with his directions—unearthed to do him honour; while, also in accordance, the best curtains were sent to the cleaners, and put back into stock, the money being of more service to Merino, whose unsophisticated, ingenuous nature would be so easily imposed upon.

Miss Bobbin's Mamma sat beside her: Miss Bobbin seldom went out to tea unaccompanied by her Mamma, for one never knew who might call, and her dear girl was so unprotected! Mrs. Bobbin was a lady of ample dimensions; when the spirit of wit was upon Mr. Bobbin he had been wont to call her "double-width." Nobody knew what he meant. Nobody ever did know what he meant in those witty seasons; but Mr. Bobbin did not stop for this. He cracked his jokes and enjoyed them and there was an end of it. Mrs. Bobbin dressed in cherry satin, in fact was unspeakably dressy; Miss Bobbin cultivated a more simple style of costume, something *à la Watteau*, and a combination of the shepherdess and mermaiden.

With Mrs. and Miss Bobbin had come their friend Mrs. Lurch, of Lurch's Tonic Ale Brewery, a rather severe person, disposed to be critical, and sensitive upon parochial matters. Mrs. Lurch kept her brougham, and this gives one the right to be a little stringent; they had all three come in the brougham, while the rest of Miss Caddie's guests had to face Brighton's dusty streets. But Mrs. Lurch's weak point was undoubtedly her cap; this was brought, sacredly secured in a box, by messenger earlier in the afternoon, addressed '*Mrs. Lurch, kind care of Miss Caddie; Please don't shake, Glass with Care; Keep dry, This side up.*' Mrs. Lurch's cap was an institution! But one milliner in Europe could construct it—a Court Milliner Mrs. Lurch described; but this had effect only in so far that the artiste dwelt in a quiet court, not a stone's throw from St. Paul's Churchyard. However, by whomsoever and wherever, it was daringly successful, was piquant, was coquettish, yet with all was matronly and becoming.

Next to Mrs. Lurch was seated Mrs. Ebenezer Wriggle, wife of the great Fish Sauce man, Pickle Merchant, and Ketchup Manufacturer, to the Royal Family. Mrs. Wriggle

was a little lady, rather sour-looking, and given to sharp sayings, incisive and not complimentary; and, inasmuch as Mr. Wriggle was an extremely disagreeable man, it could not but happen that his lady should display a slight acerbity, always being amongst the pickles.

Mrs. Josiah Bubb, the lady to her left, was the wife of a Silk Mercer—a very different thing, Mrs. Bubb was careful to point out, from your mere ordinary Draper. The shop was an establishment, the assistants, young gentlemen—not young men; it was a Saturday-closing establishment, it accommodated ladies with unlimited credit, it procured articles not in stock through their agent in the City, it possessed Show-rooms replete with every Parisian novelty, it was eminently audacious at excessive charges; and Mrs. Bubb carried her head very high, and thought very low of the Bobbins' common, ready-money customers.

Now these ladies had assembled in parliament for the one serious question of debating Westley Garland, that famous cleric having quite recently been the subject of wide criticism. First, he had the credit of saving Lady Guilmere's life; at all events at a consultation-final at which her ladyship's life had been despaired of, this Minister had stepped in, had desired to see her ladyship, had passed some time by her bedside, and had gone down stairs giving a few simple directions, and then had left as gravely and quietly as he had entered; but her ladyship revived, and was in a fair way of recovery. Next the seraph-like young curate had vanished, and in his place an accomplished reader and preacher was engaged by the discriminating Minister. This was the Rev. Robert Evelyn of Torquay, and the approval of the congregation confirmed the wisdom of the choice. And lastly, the Rev. Mr. Garland had published a new Book, and, like every work from his pen, it had been caught up with avidity, notwithstanding that it was a work of but very few pages, and thus expensive.

"I call it taking advantage, you know," cried Miss Ticklewich, wiping her greasy fingers unseen upon Miss Caddie's best table-cloth, "charging Seven-and-six for a book of not fifty pages; true, I suppose the binding to be perfection,

like all Mr. Garland's bindings, but it does seem to be too much!"

"Perhaps it is for a Charity, my love?" timidly proposed Miss Bobbin, shrinking petal within petal after the suggestion.

"And perhaps it isn't, or else why should he publish with the announcement, 'To be had only of the author'?"

"One of his eccentric ideas; I suppose you know he is full of eccentricity?"

"Well, my dear, we must certainly read the book, for it will never do to say we have not read it when its discussion is in everybody's mouth!"

"I have read it!" said Mrs. Ebenezer Wriggle with sepulchral effect, and the spinsters' heads craned while they asked in a breath,—

"Yes? And what is it?"

"Foolery, my dears, downright foolery!" And satisfied with this caustic review of a new work beyond her sphere altogether, the vindictive pickle-lady became silent. The spinsters looked at one another and took a nibble at the tea-cake, then the lady of the brougham spoke loftily before the respectful silence of her compeers.

"I, too, have read this work, but awaited dear Mrs. Wriggle's opinion before I volunteered my own; and I can quite understand our friend, worshipping as she does at so different a church, forming a harsh opinion of this publication, which seems to have caused so much sensation. And I make all allowance for her warmth of feeling, notwithstanding that Mr. Lurch, being an office-bearer in the church, has taken one dozen copies—"

"Four pounds ten!" murmured Miss Caddie under her breath.

"It is so charming to be in a position to lend!" lisped Miss Ticklewich.

"And having made that allowance," continued Mrs. Lurch proudly, "and having given the composition my close and unsectarian attention, indeed I may say having devoted an hour to it that perhaps should have been bestowed upon our Dorcas

or Mothers' meeting, I think, carefully and kindly and honestly speaking, with due admiration of Mr. Garland's undoubted talent—"

"Pass the muffin!" Thus the lady in cherry satin, at whom the speaker looked with annihilating effect, concluding her preamble,—

"In spite, I say, of the writer's acknowledged ability and that hold upon public attention he is well known to possess, I think it behoves me in this instance to admit the truth and to affirm in all candour that the book strikes me as being artificial, affected, florid, tricky, and as presenting a distorted view of history. I was shocked by a vein of cynicism which I consider unbecoming when written by a member of a Christian church,"—

"Hear! hear!" From Mrs. Wriggle, rapping with the handle of her knife upon the tray.

"—And I think the introduction of actresses and people of that class should be particularly avoided by the conscientious Minister of religion, who must know there is the possibility of it going into families where the young and impressionable are but too ready to yield to such pernicious influence."

Here Miss Bobbin, who was forty if a day, covered her features with her pocket-handkerchief.

"A little more sugar in your tea?" said Miss Caddie endearingly.

"Thank you, I will," replied Mrs. Lurch, for it was Lottie's invariable custom to commence with the smallest lump to be found.

"Did I understand you, dear Mrs. Lurch, this book is historical?" inquired Mrs. Bubb, who, as she was going out to tea on the following evening, wished to acquire some little knowledge of the theme.

"Partially so, ma'am; Mr. Lurch tells me, and he had it from the Rev. Mr. Webb, that the circumstances, although never before published, are historically correct."

"Is it written in the style of the late Mr. James, ma'am? We have the whole of his works."

"Not in the least, Mrs. Bubb!"

"Of Mr. Ainsworth, perhaps?"

"No, ma'am, in a style peculiar to Mr. Garland alone, and a style that is too poetic for my commonplace understanding. But my husband altogether controverts my judgment by saying the book is the most beautiful composition he has ever read."

"I should not call Mr. Lurch a competent critic!" volunteered Mrs. Wriggle snappishly.

"And pray, ma'am, why not? But perhaps you would place Mr. Wriggle first as a literary authority?"

"Well, I think neither on 'em shine at that sort of thing. But Ebenezer, ma'am, has been deacon of the Congregational for twenty years, and under five ministers, three on 'em young men fresh from college, but clever preachers and composers; the other two, gentlemen of experience from larger parishes than ours. In that time Ebenezer, ma'am, has acquired considerable insight into genius, and extensive acquaintance with ability, and he says there ain't neither one nor t'other in this conception of your puffed-up preacher! For my part I've no patience with the man, a-going poking about even into houses where our Mr. Jones has lent books and is doing a little good."

"Well, as for that," put in Miss Ticklewich, who also attended at the tabernacle presided over by the Rev. Jacob Jones, "he goes into the houses where the Ritualists seem to have absolute control; it doesn't much matter what or where, he is always welcomed!"

"Oh, dear me!" hissed Mrs. Wriggle, while Miss Merino covered her features again, "a little sweetness, I fancy; so *you* are joining the band of foolish virgins! Take care, my child, take care! Set not your heart upon this Adonis of the ways of Belial. Bah!"

"Our Kitty's fancy is but temporarily alienated," remarked Miss Caddie. "When we get Christopher Cricket settled at the High Road Church, we shall see what we shall see!" and the speaker playfully fidgeted the angle of a lump of sugar with the tongs, wickedly piercing the blushing Kitty with her keen little eyes.

The remark was in allusion to the selection of Dr. Christopher Cricket for the pulpit of the church named, which had fallen upon hard times, having been many months without an appointed minister. The people were hard to please, and the deacons made a point of always disagreeing one with another; hence, although men of every shade of thought and degree of excellence had been invited to occupy the pulpit for a day, upon the beautiful system of trial-preaching, they had not before this unanimously decided upon a divine. Their choice had now fallen upon a somewhat elderly yet withal gifted man, who for the advantages to be derived from residence upon this coast, consented to accept the long-vacated pulpit, and in his heart of hearts designed doing the utmost possible good consistent with the principles of dissent. This gentleman, it may be further remarked, was unmarried, was monied, and was possessed of exceedingly pleasant manners; true he was plain of feature and not striking as a preacher, but then these were minor items. It was known he thought deeply, and it was believed his heart was good.

Thus, what with the doctor to come, and the clever curate who had come, the ladies of the combined denominations were at no loss for tea-table gossip.

Few of the select little teas of Brighton were flavoured with richer tit-bits of gossip and scandal than Miss Charlotte Caddie's. Somehow she gathered and gleaned on the right hand and on the left, passing over no little scrap of news as unworthy of notice, until she became a perfect encyclopedia of all that was past, passing, or to pass; and was valued and esteemed accordingly. It was not the really good tea on the real Japan tea-board, or the irresistibly winning ways, with the perpetual simper upon the withered lips, which seemed to run down the glossy silk and present an endless smile; but it was to learn the exquisite morsels of human naughtiness for which this lady appeared to go about with a basket; and "smallest contributions thankfully received."

Thus this *bureau de scandale* was honoured and its directress well beloved: as Oracle, the words of her lips had weight, and it was with semi-official reserve she deigned to enlighten

the votaries of her temple. Now upon this evening, Miss Ticklewich having asked tenderly, "Have you let your house, Lottie?" referring to a small and prettily furnished cottage-residence, the property of her friend, and which had been for some time in the House Agent's hands; Miss Caddie had replied "No!" rather sharply, and immediately looked straight at the strawberry knob of the tea-pot; they knew that the Oracle was thinking; that if they did not speak the Oracle would; and there was a death-like silence. All eyes were bent upon that imposingly angular figure at the head of the table, and while each asked within herself, "Who now, I wonder?" the lips were seen to move, the eyes were lifted from the strawberry, and seemed to dwell with infinite pathos upon each face saddening before that melancholy gaze; and then, with hushed, impressive utterance, the wise one said,—

"I have been thinking, ladies, of the paucity of materials relative to this Mr. Garland's past. Who the dickens is he? Where the dickens did he come from? Recommended, you will say, by the late Lord Guilmere, presented to the living by the late Earl Heronby. Both these men are dead, and that is not enough for me? Ladies, Brighton has been taken captive, and bereft of its senses by this disciple of polish, this criterion of culture, this hero in lawn—"

"Corded silk!" ventured Mrs. Bubb, half above a whisper, "Bubb procured it!"

"Madam, the fabric is immaterial!" And with this reproachful corrective, uttered with plaintive sweetness, Miss Caddie resumed,—"It has struck me, ladies, as not a little singular that here we have, first, Mr. Garland, next Mr. Webb, and now Mr. Evelyn; and we know absolutely nothing of any of them: ladies, we ought to know more! Who can acquaint us with the antecedents of the Rev. Robert Evelyn? Who can acquaint us with the antecedents of the Rev. Spencer Webb? Who can acquaint us with the antecedents of the Rev. Westley Garland? I ask, who the dickens, who?"

"I CAN."

There in the doorway stood a tall, sardonic form, whose approach and low knock had been unheard for the gabble. He wore

"There, in the doorway, stood a tall, sardonic form,"—PAGE 296.

the most mocking cast of features either spinster had seen outside of dreams; he stooped a little and held a hat by the palm of his hands; he had one long foot within the room, and he asked, with the levity of an alligator,—

"May I come in?"

Miss Ticklewich emitted a stifled shriek.

Miss Bobbin retreated behind the pocket handkerchief.

Miss Caddie bowed her classical profile until hidden by the urn.

Then, with admirable presence of mind, Mrs. Lurch, Mrs. Bubb, and Mrs. Bobbin rose and demanded the cause of the intrusion.

"Tell us, sir, before you enter this apartment, the reason of your unceremonious appearance. Are there no servants in the house, or are you so devoid of decency as not to understand that a chamber tenanted by ladies, and especially by young maiden ladies, is sacredly private, and ought never, under any circumstances, to be intruded upon?"

It was Mrs. Lurch who accepted the *rôle* of spokeswoman at a moment's notice, and by implied consent of the others.

The stranger gave his long, thin leg a sinuous twist, similar to the serpentine figure rendered familiar by Mr. F. Vokes, and jerkily explained,—

"Called to see Miss Caddie—referred to her respecting a house I thought of hiring—servant very slow—knocked—didn't hear—took liberty of opening door—smell of muffins too much for me—couldn't speak—you were busy—ecclesiastics,—thought I'd answer—knowing something of 'em. My card—allow me!"

He was by the table at a stride, and had laid the card upon the spout of the urn under the very eyes of the startled hostess before she had recovered herself. The mere mention of the cottage worked wonders, Miss Caddie looked at the card and read, *Mr. Noel Barnard.*

"Do pray sit down!" said Miss Caddie, politely, to her guests and to the strange gentleman. They did so, the gentleman sitting as near to the ladies who had been married, as possible.

"I am sure you will pardon the introduction of business into our pleasant midst; I daresay this gentleman will not detain us very long?" and Miss Caddie looked appealingly from her friends to the possible tenant.

Miss Bobbin gave a sudden scream, and there was great confusion. Nestling for protection close to her mother, she thought the gentleman had brought a large black dog in with him! No, he had not brought a large black dog in with him, and order was restored. Her bosom friend, Kitty Ticklewich, thinking it a ruse, waxed cross, and remarked spitefully to Miss Caddie, "How nervous we are this evening! I think it's the weather."

"Won't detain you two minutes—want a house in Brighton to run down to occasionally—my business is in the City,—looking round, struck me that little place of yours might suit; want doing up, improved by a few flowers.—Muffin getting cold, pray don't stop, I'll wait; muffin—roll—yeast dumplings—all those sort of things, detestable cold!"

"Quite a domestic man, I declare!" whispered Mrs. Bobbin to Mrs. Lurch, and nudging the sensitive Merino.

"Thank you, sir, we had finished! May I offer you a cup of tea?"

"You are kind—and I am grateful—but is there any green in it? Never drink green, afraid of nervousness!"

"I am sorry to say there is, sir!"

"Then I won't have any, thank you; let the girl take the tray away, and we'll get to business!"

Miss Caddie rang the bell, abashed by the stranger's freedom. Upon the clearance being made, he drew up to the table, planted his elbows thereon, Australian fashion, and asked,—

"Now then, Miss Caddie, let's see if this diminutive villa is within the means of monthly payment by a poor person."

"I want two guineas a week for it, sir!"

"And not dear either, upon my word—and of course you pay the taxes?"

"The taxes bring it up to—Well, yes, I agree to pay the taxes!"

"And very honourable, by the Lord Chancellor! Then we

may consider it settled; I take it; and I do hope you'll run in and see me sometimes—old bachelor—very quiet—appreciative of such consideration. Beg pardon, a daddy-long-legs on your cap, ma'am!" This to Mrs. Lurch, who, turning very white, and unable or unwilling to remove that fortress, sank back, gasping for deliverance from the reptile; but unfortunately the coterie was unanimous in its alarm at such long-legged things, and what the consequences would have been no honest chronicler dare relate, had not the strange gentleman taken a stride to the fireplace, caught the hearth-brush from its nail, and whisked off the annoying creature before the enraged lady of the brougham was aware of his design.

"Nasty things, ain't they?" To Mrs. Wriggle, sharply.

"Some legs are too long for anybody's comfort, they take parties where they ain't wanted!" and the lady, violently annoyed, turned her chair round, sitting with her back to the bold and officious stranger.

Timorous of an upset, and well aware that no lady present would hesitate to speak her mind, should occasion offer, Miss Caddie softly rose, extended her hand to the gentleman, and said, "I think we understand each other!"

The gentleman stood up, took the hand, and shook it warmly over the table, said "I think we do!" and sat down again.

The ladies looked at one another, contemplating the expediency of retiring, when, with an air of confidence, the gentleman said,—

"I heard our fair hostess asking important questions relative to the reference, personal security, bankers, &c., of our accomplished friend the famous Minister. Now, as I had the pleasure of being at college with that young man—or at least he was young then—I feel in a position of acquaintance with those particulars inquired for, or at least with certain of them. Mind, I press my information upon nobody—in fact I have already stayed too long—"

"Oh, no!" cried a chorus of seven. "Do tell us a little about dear Mr. Garland, whom we all admire and respect so very much!"

"I thought you did! Well, what I have to tell is, that he

is in every way worthy the 'much admiration and respect' you bestow upon him!"

"And is that all?" asked Miss Kitty Ticklewich, sniffing like the scraggy war-horse reined in from a pursuit.

"Absolutely all, dear madam; while I was at Oxford with him, nothing was ever seen other than the most exacting must revere and admire." A cloud flitted across the hard face; for a moment Noel Barnard seemed human.

"I never knew any good thing come out of Oxford!" cried Mrs. Wriggle viciously.

"How excessively unkind, since I but just now said I was there!" And the stranger looked killingly at the war-horse, a look which imparted an expression so legitimately diabolic, Miss Bobbin wound her forty-year-old arm through that of Lottie Caddie, whispering, "Isn't he dreadful?"

"Hush, my sweet, how do we know that it is not some Member of Parliament? I am sure he has the look of a Statesman!" this aside in reply, adding aloud, "Of course our friend excepted present company, Mr.—Mr. Barnard."

"Oh, ah, yes, how good of you—defend me thus continuously, and what a divine creature I shall think you, really!" He put up his eye-glass and looked at the Japanese maiden long and thoughtfully. Miss Caddie, overawed, tried to squeeze a tear, it would not come, and there was a painful silence; then the silvery voice of Mrs. Bubb broke the spell with "We have been discussing the merits of the new Book—"

"Garland's 'Triumph of Seasons'—Got one in my pocket—capital thing!"

All was eagerness and "May we have a glimpse at it?" "Do you mind our glancing at the first and last chapters?" "Can you tell us about it?" "Will you permit us to look at it?" "How thoughtful to have it with you!" "We are so indebted!" Midst of all which the gentleman was slowly feeling behind at his coat-pocket; when they had done, he calmly remarked,—

"Sorry—find I've omitted putting it in my pocket—nuisance too; what's to be done? Step to the hotel and fetch it—"

"Oh, pray don't—we can get it at the library!" from Mrs. Bobbin, who feared they would not look upon the pleasant countenance again.

"None in the libraries, by special request of the author: wants people to buy 'em."

"Do you know it has struck me once or twice, this Mr. Garland is something of *a miser!*" a speculation hazarded by Miss Caddie, who had tried everything else. "Look at the money he must be making, what with his Church, his Books, and the Lectures! Oh, he is saving, depend on't!"

And the idea seemed to rivet the attention of the visitor, who, with elbows still on the table, placed his thumbs side by side thoughtfully, looking down absorbed by some close calculation while apparently following the mazy pattern of the table-cloth.

"You may be sure he wouldn't work as he does if it wasn't to realize money, it isn't all love of the work!"

"Well, I think you're right, my dear!" said silvery Mrs. Bubb, "you know, living opposite the Bank, we have rather advantageous facility for discovering who keeps an account, and I do think, now you mention it, I *have* seen the Rev. Mr. Garland in and out more than is quite consistent with a Minister of the Church!"

"Oho! methinks I smell a rat! Do you smell a rat, sir?"

Asked by the amiable Mrs. Wriggle of the visitor; and he, still tracing the curl of that designing foliage, answered dryly, with a sniff, "I think I do, ma'am!"

"Catch the Rev. Mr. Jones going into Banks; or Dr. Christopher Cricket—"

"Beg pardon, ma'am—?"

"Or Dr. Christopher Cricket, sir, the conscientious Nonconformist minister who has accepted the pastorate of our leading Church; would he set store by the dross which perisheth? Would he fritter away his time in and out o' Banks? I should like to see him! Dr. Cricket, sir, is a Christian—"

"A Christian cricket!" put in the visitor pleasantly,

whereat the lady fumed; excited and scandalized by the levity this person betrayed.

"Well, my dear," now ventured the just daughter of the jocular saddle-maker, "I cannot for my part reconcile the amassing of money with the good Mr. Garland does in the town and neighbourhood, ay and beyond this county altogether, as is well known; not alone are his benefits bestowed upon charities, but also upon individuals nobody hears about!"

"Hoity toity! Here's a champion! Why, don't you see, my child, that this is all a blind?" exclaimed Mrs. Wriggle, tossing her head virtuously.

"I don't think taking a new place in the country looks very like penurious principles!" cried Mrs. Lurch. "Mr. Webb told Mr. Lurch that Mr. Garland had bought an old mansion hidden somewhere away in the downs, which nobody would ever pass and nobody could ever find; because the place is haunted, or something."

"Is it the old place they call the Moated Grange?"

"The same: it is at Hawkingdean, the most out-of-the-way village in the whole range of downland valleys. Mr. Webb said that was why Mr. Garland had purchased it, that he might, when so inclined, be absent entirely from the noise and bustle of the town. Mr. Garland is not so strong as some people think, and sometimes, in his studious moods, is very reserved and gloomy."

"This is really interesting," muttered the visitor, intent on the pattern.

"What, sir?"

"The ingenuity with which the artist has contrived to extricate this leaf from the labyrinth of foliage. But, beg pardon, you were saying something about this new place of Garland's. Is it far?"

"Some few miles; nothing to see from this old house, save another old house, where a deeper student than Mr. Garland even, lives,—a horrid old bookworm; there is also the clergyman of the village, white-haired, and stupid with divinity and theology; so that our learned scholar will be in congenial

society! That is, if the owner of the Bishop's House—Bishop Bonner having resided there—is disposed to be sociable, which is rather doubtful, for he is a queer stick."

After this effort Mrs. Lurch looked significantly round the room. It was all very well talking like a field lecturer, but darling Lottie really ought to bring out the sherry and biscuits; sufficient time had elapsed since tea, and they would soon be going.

"I thought there was something in the wind," said Miss Caddie, with a peculiarly knowing air, "when I first heard of this clever Mr. Evelyn coming. I shouldn't be surprised if he and Mr. Webb do all the evening duties between 'em. I wonder how the guinea per quarter seat-holders will like that!"

"A sermon of Mr. Garland's," cried Kitty Ticklewich, "is beautiful enough to subsist upon for a month."

"Miss Ticklewich, are you a respectable Nonconformist?" asked Mrs. Wriggle severely. "Because, if you are, as a communicant at our church, I think it scandalous you should maintain this prejudice in favour of our enemies."

"Mr. Garland is the enemy of no one,—not even of his greatest enemy."

The playful surface Miss Ticklewich presented to Society, and the juvenile and artless winsomeness she assumed, disarmed reprimand and disabled reproach. The sand-coloured hair also was a non-conductor, and all the scathing shafts of indignant anger passed off her, as she said this, with her most killing look, like rain-drops off a duck's back.

Miss Caddie's new tenant rose to go; and, taking an affecting leave of his landlady, politely saluted the others, and departed. It was the signal preceding a general uprising for a continuation of the debate, while going upstairs, upon the quality and presentment of Mr. Noel Barnard, opinion being divided; and for a private word from Miss Caddie, delivered as the *bonne-bouche* of the evening. It was,—

"Robert Evelyn has a beautiful daughter; her portrait hangs in the dining-room of Evelyn's new house. As I passed last evening, I saw through a crevice of the Venetian

blind, and Mr. Garland stood before that picture, alone, and with anything but the expression a MINISTER should wear upon his countenance!"

There was great crooning, and Mrs. Wriggle was heard to moan, "Belial! Belial!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT EAGLE HALL.

Sir Kinnaird Dalton was fairly settled at Eagle Hall, Torquay, the beautiful Devonshire property, acquired possession of in so singular and so sad a manner. Perhaps no man ever entered upon fair estate with a heavier heart; for the thought of his old friend Lionel, and thoughts of Lionel's wife and child, were ever present. Of course the mansion had been furnished with magnificence, and the gardens and approaches restored and improved, until no seat in the county presented a more perfect exterior or interior.

Sir Kinnaird Dalton was not young; he did not go into ecstasies over his new possession, even though nothing fairer might be found beneath the sun; and even when assenting to this costly furnishing of the mansion, it was with the devout intention, could he but shake off that incubus, Noel Barnard, of restoring the whole, furnished, redecorated, and generally improved, to Mrs. Travers, should that unhappy and beauteous lady ever cross his path. But, alas! both Lionel's widow and child had disappeared; and, like others interested in their welfare, Sir Kinnaird entertained grave suspicions of foul play. He kept these suspicions to himself, but privately caused every inquiry to be made, and spared neither cost nor trouble in prosecuting this investigation, the more arduous of transaction from the necessity for its being all unknown to the Secretary.

In addition to being a man of honour and most gentle breeding, Sir Kinnaird Dalton was a man of feeling. Few would have suspected the depth of tenderness underlying that *insouciance* and elegance of manner; and so in sympathy was

he with his unfortunate and ill-fated friend, he would know no rest in that friend's home while he remained its possessor. It was a common remark of his, when indolently at rest and alone, "Never mind, old fellow, I will do as much for yours as I am sure you would have done for mine. I but bide the hour of their discovery."

At the time the baronet makes *rentrée* in the story, he was enjoying a brief respite from the annoying presence of his whilom Secretary, that irrepressible personage having private business elsewhere. Mr. Barnard was not ceremonious, but went upon these frequent missions at will, merely mentioning the fact of his immediate departure, sometimes not mentioning that fact at all, leaving it for Sir Kinnaird to learn through one or other of the sympathizing and devoted servants. These continuous flittings of the ill-omened bird of passage were always welcomed by Sir Kinnaird with as warm a feeling as the languor of his habitual mood would admit; really he tried to forget the existence of the person when not absolutely in his presence, and succeeded far more readily than in the case of poor Lionel, whose poet face, with its world of thought, heroic determination, and loftiness of soul, was ever before him as he had known it in the days at Oxford, when Beresford Travers's son was king of his college.

A circumstance had occurred the day following Noel Barnard's departure, which tended to inspire renewed confidence in the success of his investigations. A day or two before, Hammond, Sir Kinnaird's valet, had entered the room where his master and the Secretary were engaged in an unusually high dispute,—so violent, the man's presence was unnoticed until he had heard far too much to please either gentleman. Sir Kinnaird was terribly confused. Noel Barnard, quietly but deeply exasperated, discharged a volley of censorious remarks at the man, who proceeded gently with his work, and retired without having taken any notice whatever of the imperious Secretary; but after he had gone, Hammond sought an interview with his master, and there and then laid before him that conversation recorded as having taken place between himself and Mr. Simmons, Sir Kinnaird's private attendant,

with the connecting circumstances. Sir Kinnaird at once saw that the man, if conciliated, might be of service to himself; besides, he knew sufficient to become an awkward mischief-maker. He adopted the wiser policy dealt munificently, with him, and treated him with confidence.

"You've behaved as the gentleman I've always found you, Sir Kinnaird; and I do hope I'll be able to serve you. I don't say I haven't a conscience, but I do say as people as is looking out for to keep a hotel mustn't have too much! But this I'll add with respect, Sir Kinnaird,—and not to mention such things in your presence, sir,—that whenever you want that confounded Mr. Noel Barnard put out of the way, I'll be proud and pleased to do it, if it costs the price of my Licence for the halter."

To this Sir Kinnaird, with mild reproval, and the calm, indolent sweetness characteristic of him, replied,—

"Barnard is a little contrary, I admit; the fellow bores and worries me beyond accounting for with my pacific temperament, but the more one ruffles oneself the more one may, and it is horribly common getting into these disturbed states. I never could go in for phrenology, or any of those things, but it seems to me Barnard was born with a lot of queer organs, and if I am without them I would rather feel content than allow another fellow's organs to irritate me. He reminds one of that man in the Bible whose hand was against every man; but imitate my example, Hammond, and accept it with placid resignation. If people would only do this with all the pests fretting and teasing them, what a deal longer every one would live! Pass me the rose-water, and then a cushion, please. You have much to learn; it is as essential for me to have my comfort studied as my interest." And leaning back luxuriously —inasmuch as luxuriousness was independent of effort—Sir Kinnaird Dalton passed gently off to sleep.

Sir Kinnaird had been not a little surprised and gratified to hear others were in reality engaged upon a similar quest to his own, although who they could be, unless employed by Beresford Travers, he was at a loss to imagine.

It was the day following that of Mr. Barnard's departure.

Sir Kinnaird Dalton, walking up and down the terrace of his garden, with hands clasped behind, ever and anon directed an admiring glance beyond the rocky and thickly timbered domain at his feet. Devonshire was new ground to the baronet, and he had not yet mastered the sense of pleasure at its novel attractiveness.

The giant tors that overshadowed the nestling town, that town with its un-English elegance and its prodigality of beautiful surrounding—the far stretch to Totness and Berry, the fanciful expanse away there by Dartmoor and Dartmouth, the rugged romantic coast-line, with its clefts and coves far beyond Brixham and Babbicombe, the quiet, picturesque drives to Exmouth and Dawlish, the splendid semicircle of sea-line, the broken panorama of rocks with their nooks and glens clustered with foliage, the crags trailing with wild flowers, and the vast sweep of greensward, of heath, and of fern, all presented a picture as delightful to the eye as it was pleasing to the fancy.

Thus thought Sir Kinnaird Dalton; and thus thought two gentlemen toiling up the steep ascent.

"Magnificent!" cried the younger of the two, pausing to look around while he waited for his older companion, who climbed the hill with more difficulty.

"Magnificent, indeed, my dear Garston; but I wish it was on level ground." And Mr. Beresford Travers stopped to regain breath.

"Then we should not enjoy the view, sir; now, confess it is worth the coming for."

"That depends upon the result of our visit. I only hope we may find the gentleman at home, and alone."

"He must make himself at home for once; nothing I should like better, though, than to engage in a little misunderstanding with that rascally Secretary. Now that I am upon poor old Lionel's own ground I feel so excited and thrilled I can scarcely talk with that cool self-possession I know you like to see me display. To look upon all this fairy scene, and think that through the machiavellian plots of a perjured traitor—"

"Hush! hush! My dear boy, you are so impetuous."

"Well, I admit it, but not in all things; it is only in anything concerning Lionel's fair fame. He was my friend. That means so much with me."

"I know it does, my dear boy, and I thank you for him."

For some moments the old gentleman was too agitated to continue. An only son, Lionel had been deeply loved; perhaps because of this the wonder had been greater, the wound deeper, at his supposed treachery.

As they approached the grounds of Eagle Hall they saw its owner walking upon the garden terrace.

"Dalton wears well," remarked Mr. Travers; "the same youthful, lustrous creature as of yore."

"You see he keeps himself cool and collected, while I am wearing out fast. Well, I suppose if there were no burning mountains there would be no pumice, and I believe scarcely any one would deny virtue to that useful cinder. So that is Sir Kinnaird! I have not seen him before; evidently a connoisseur in dressing-gowns. Gorgeous affair, isn't it? What's he doing—smoking?"

"He does not smoke."

"Poor devil! Another of life's pleasures lost to him."

"A matter of opinion, sir; but here comes the servant, he has seen us."

Sir Kinnaird had seen them, with the incisive comment,—

"Awful nuisance, some people found me out." When, however, they drew near he recognized Mr. Beresford Travers with considerable pleasure, augmented upon Hammond's respectfully approaching and informing his master that the younger of the two gentlemen was the person who had accosted him in the street. "Admit them; a blessing Barnard happens to be away this morning; send Simmons with my coat; show the gentlemen into the breakfast-room."

Sir Kinnaird reclined upon a garden-seat, overpowered by the idea of receiving visitors thus early in the day. He disliked visitors at any hour; but, at an early hour, wished them favouring some other friend.

Simmons appeared with his master's coat, walking upon the grass lest the sound of his footstep upon the gravel should

grate upon those sensitive ears; he stood silent behind the seat, holding the garment with a care more reverent than servile; looking down, not to allow of a supposition of rude or negligent gazing. He had brought a small glass, a clothes' brush, a flower for the button-hole, and a morning pocket-handkerchief faintly perfumed.

"Simmons."

"Sir Kinnaird." One step forward, silently, head slightly bowed as implying deference.

"I would give a sovereign for a nice quiet doze amongst the mignonette, but I must exercise self-denial in this instance. Be at hand after it is over, for I shall be tremendously exhausted; isn't there a tuft of hair wrong at the back here? Something fidgets me." The baronet looked in the glass, held in a convenient position by the attendant artist.

"Everything is perfectly smooth, Sir Kinnaird; but if you will permit me to fetch the cosmetic—"

"Don't trouble; always a draught out of doors; worst of gardens! I never can understand how the insects get along so well as they do; now the handkerchief—thanks."

It was with curious sensations Mr. Beresford Travers found himself ushered into the room which had once been his favourite of the suite. But how metamorphosed, what excess of embellishment, what lavish decoration! True, the house was the same, but transformed into a palace. Herbert Garston was humming "*Il Bandito*" from Verdi's *Ernani*, the score of which, open at the piano, wooed the musician to trial of the instrument, when Sir Kinnaird entered and cordially shook hands with Mr. Travers.

"So glad to see you; how well you are looking!"

And then Mr. Travers introduced his friend Herbert.

"Had the honour of meeting your mother some months ago at Lady Huntingtower's."

Herbert bowed.

"But do sit down, you are tired, and it is warm; even a short stroll upon the terrace has fatigued me."

"You seem pretty sound, Dalton; nobody in England looks better, or as well, I should think!"

"Why not reduce me to that level of odium, the *bon-vivant* of the club-house? I am afraid it is all very hollow, my dear Mr. Travers, for I am rather charged with spleen just now."

"What is the matter; nothing serious, I hope?"

"Very, to me, sir!"

Sir Kinnaird fell back upon a lounge, the sunlight gleaming upon the hair, swept away from the brow and falling tumbled upon the coat; the thin delicate face, with its fine profile and sensitive quivering of the nostril, had a singularly patrician look, with all its fragile moulding and femininely clear bloom. Mr. Garston rose to draw the curtain, thinking the light too strong for the indolent baronet.

"No, don't, please! The sun and I are good friends: I am like the ephemera that bask in its rays, and after it has gone are colourless!" He seemed making good the words, lying upon his back, looking up at the ceiling, bathed in the broad golden beam.

"You were going, I think, to tell us what this serious matter is, Sir Kinnaird? I need scarcely add that anything you now say will be received by us in perfect confidence!"

"Frankly, my dear sir, my coachman has taken to eating onions."

The two gentlemen burst into a fit of hearty laughter, of which Sir Kinnaird took no notice, continuing as gravely, "And with my fine sense of smell, no greater catastrophe could have happened. What is to be done? This fine sea-air and aroma of the country are lost to me for ever, unless I discharge the man. And he is an old and valued servant; it is very embarrassing, very!"

"I should remedy it," said Mr. Garston, "by instructing the cook to bake some, and enjoying a deliberate feast of the bulb for supper; for my part, I admire the coachman's taste."

Sir Kinnaird Dalton uttered a low moan, the subject was too insufferably vulgar to extend it by replying. He raised his head a little, looking at the elder of the two gentlemen. "To what am I indebted?"

"Well, you may not, perhaps, be aware that you forestalled me by purchasing this estate."

"I thought you ought to have bought it, if you did not; but, as a matter of fact, my Secretary, aware of my prepossession in favour of this county, and of the sort of place I was looking out for, had effected the purchase before I had time to turn round. It is a captivating place, and I could rest content, were it not for thinking of my old friend Lionel—pardon the allusion in your presence!"

"We have come to you this morning to ask if you can throw any light upon recent events. I know it does not follow that you can, because this Mr. Barnard is now Secretary to yourself, but you may possibly know something of the whereabouts of Mrs. Lionel and her child; admitting no foul usage has been exercised—which we, with all moderation, fear to have been the case. I do not say mysterious disappearances are impossible or uncommon, but it is morally—"

"Legally!" interposed Mr. Garston.

"Morally and legally impossible for a lady, especially a lady of Mrs. Lionel's birth and breeding, and her little girl, particularly a little girl of the unapproachable beauty of this child, to disappear off the face of the earth without leaving some indication."

"And that indication we are determined to move creation to obtain, sir," and, violently excited, Mr. Garston was about resuming his expression of opinion, when, happening to glance at Sir Kinnaird, he exclaimed,—

"Why, bless me, he has gone to sleep!"

It appeared to be the case; the baronet, like a figure of wax, was lying with closed eyes, and a half-smile at hide-and-seek with the sun, about the corners of the mouth; but no, the lips parted, and—

"Go on, please; I am all attention, only I am thinking. The speculation has wandered into an unpleasant region, I may or may not think as you do; this believe, I can throw no light upon the matter; of course they will turn up some day; I cannot think where people *do* get to! I passed a man in the Park, last spring; gave me quite a start; thought he'd been

gone long ago, in fact read of his demise in the paper; and for a fellow to be riding about parks after that, you know, is a shame. Take courage, they'll turn up one of these days."

To honest Herbert Garston this looked so very like thoughtless, careless, and unfeeling liberty, he was out of all patience with it, and, bringing his hand down impulsively upon the table, he exclaimed,—

"But that is not enough, sir, we wish to ascertain the truth."

"You really must not make so much noise, or you will give me the headache for a month!" The door here opened softly, and Simmons entered with *eau-de-cologne*, in a tiny dish once the property of Louis the Magnificent. He advanced upon tiptoe to the side of his master, and, with a diminutive sponge of soft fineness, applied the restorative to his master's brow and nostrils. Sir Kinnaird submitted passively, with the quiet semi-apology,—

"Don't take any notice, please, gentlemen; this faithful fellow knows how the least agitation disturbs my nervous system."

Mr. Garston, impatiently taking up an album, looked as though he would dash for relief amongst the Parian gods and goddesses, and give them a taste of the muscular.

The faithful fellow having retired, Sir Kinnaird, with graceful courtesy, although somewhat languidly, begged Mr. Garston would proceed. Mr. Travers undertook to explain their present position, extenuating his friend's impulsive feeling on the ground of his having been bonded with poor Lionel in close friendship, and by the equally close alliance of Art and Letters.

"At which," cried Garston, with a frank smile, "I made but little progress, while Lionel outshone all whom I have known by the brilliance of his genius and the diverse nature of his attainments. I was much too eager, to study, and my gifts, such as they were, burned themselves out; but they left, I think, the perseverance, if not the patience!"

Sir Kinnaird, leaning upon an elbow, looked the speaker in the face.

"Do you know I am charmed with your candour; if I

were nearer, would give you my hand. I appreciate a character of this description! Ah!" (sighing) "I have never known eagerness, or gifts, or perseverance, or the other things you enumerate; the only thing I can experience gratitude for possessing, is—friendship, true to the death, ay, and beyond the death. I can't make a fuss about it, but there it is, and —Lionel Travers was *my friend*."

The earnest, calm sincerity, and unmoved passion, came forth in the words, spoken with the ease and repose of perfect breeding, yet with the solemnity of an abiding constancy. For the moment it scarcely seemed that luxurious, dainty creature of the sunbeam who had thus spoken.

Mr. Travers, rising, thanked the baronet for his chivalrous allegiance; the old gentleman, last representative of the honoured houses of Beresford and Travers, felt his position acutely; the silvered head, noble still, though bowed, moved Sir Kinnaird to supreme pity; he likewise rose and walked with Mr. Travers to the window.

"It is good of you, Sir Kinnaird, to preserve your esteem for the memory of my poor boy, whose fair name tarnished, and integrity disputed, lives but in the choice regard of a very few."

"I don't think so—excuse my interrupting you—I believe but half the fellows, and very few of the outside world thought ill of Lionel. It is generally supposed he was environed by money-lenders, as many have been before him. Remember when my father died I was in a precious mess myself, and if Huntingtowers hadn't backed some bills, I should have lost my horses. I admit there's awful complication about Lionel's affairs, and I always get lost over that sort of thing; but I shouldn't wonder if one of these days the wind blew them straight."

"A hundred thousand seems a preposterous figure."

"It is large—I didn't know he was embarrassed."

"Nor I; and Lionel had the wrong blood in his veins to appeal to me or acquaint me with it, neither should I have assisted him had he done so—I was too embittered against him at the time."

"Ay, there was the mistake; Lionel was too much of a gentleman and too tender-hearted ever to have wronged you in any way, and much too sensitive to be treated with the rigour you displayed; but it is past now, and no one has the right to self-inflict torture by recalling anything unpleasant —at least, such is my creed."

"How *can* I make reparation? I shall be so willing, so glad to do so; but I cannot see how. I have tried my best to trace Ella and her child; I would provide for both, and thus atone in some degree for my blind and inhuman fault, and at my death Lionel's child shall have the property."

"A noble atonement!"

"But insufficient," answered the old gentleman sadly. "You see it is an awkward business, or I would pay off the debt; but it would soon be known that I had done so, and while not clearing my son's good name, it would impoverish the estate to line the pockets of goodness knows what usurers and vampires."

"No, you would have to deal only with Noel Barnard; he brought about the entire catastrophe, and has become sole possessor of the claims."

"And cannot, I suppose, be compelled to sell?"

"No earthly power would make him do so. One thing I promise you, upon my honour—discover Mrs. Travers, and she is welcome to occupy this place just as it is. I will reside upon the Continent whenever this is agreeable. As you are aware, my mother is at Florence. She has often entreated me to share her villa; once telegraph me Mrs. Travers is found, and I will vacate, joining Lady Dalton as speedily as may be consistent with my usually sluggish movements; you know I am one of the unfortunate wretches who cannot hurry."

"What you have offered is so nobly disinterested, Sir Kinnaird, I am overcome. I can only thank you, only tell you how deeply sensible I am of your goodness; but this will be unnecessary. It is now my part, if any one's, to act generously."

Mr. Travers passed his hand thoughtfully across his eyes;

the great Beresford and Travers diamond gleamed in the sun; the pleasant features wore an expression of severe pain.

"It goes against my principles and feelings to know of this man's infamy and to be unable to bring him to justice."

"It is not yet a case where justice can step in; there are some criminal dilemmas best managed privately."

"Yes, myself and friend have so decided. Garston," turning to address that gentleman, seated at the table, "Sir Kinnaird has just expressed the opinion, coinciding with our own, of the necessity for private investigation."

Hands in the pockets of his shooting-coat, Mr. Garston sauntered to the window, remarking,—

"A gallows, sir, high as Haman's, ay, and double fifty cubits—"

"Would present a fine view of the Devonshire perspective, sir," said a sardonic voice, from out a bower crimson with splendour of the Virginia creeper, which parted like ruddy curtains, while the black form of Noel Barnard was seen advancing.

"*You* here!" said Sir Kinnaird, the least shade of annoyance to be perceived.

"My presence is too valuable, Sir Kinnaird, to warrant long absence. I returned an hour ago—found you engaged—stepped into the arbour—delightful, all but the earwigs! Fine morning, gentlemen; Mr. Travers, I hope, is well?"

"Mr. Travers was well, sir, up to seeing yourself, than which he would rather have the gout."

And, somewhat testily for him, the old gentleman held his hand to Sir Kinnaird, with the remark, "We will be going now."

"Don't let me frighten you away; I will retire," said the accommodating Mr. Barnard.

"Frighten, sir—you'd frighten the devil!" And the owner of Beresford Court, for once terribly discomposed, passed his pocket-handkerchief over his brow.

"I am not on visiting terms—so don't know. Hope you like Sir Kinnaird Dalton's new place? Very airy, agreeable situation!"

"A word with you, Mr. Noel Barnard."

It was Herbert Garston, who came forward, his face red with ire and indignation. The Secretary looked coolly at the other with the sarcasm which, at times serving for weapon, was more effective than the blunter mode of biting words.

"I beg to tell you, sir, that if Sir Kinnaird Dalton submits to your insolent audacity, you cannot expect other people to; I, for one, won't: and I advise you, whenever in my presence, to keep a civil or a silent tongue in your head."

The situation was dramatic. Sir Kinnaird watched with eager interest to see how his impregnable scribe would receive the blunt attack. Mr. Travers looked at his friend with considerable admiration. Mr. Travers could never have engaged in an open tourney of the kind, dreading, upon principle, an upset of any description, or any accident calculated to disturb the repose guaranteed by his years and position. Mr. Barnard sat crossways upon a chair, elbows upon its back, and, with the most irritating effrontery, invited the speaker to define his notion of a civil, if not of a silent, tongue.

"I will tell you—be you Tutor, Secretary, or deuce knows what; and may you profit by it, or one of these days you may find yourself bowled over! A civil tongue in the head, sir, is to speak with deference in the presence of gentlemen, and with respect in the presence of a master; and a silent tongue is to speak only when spoken to!"

"Hear! hear!" said an audible voice outside, where Simmons stood upon the mat, first scenting a scene with the quick instinct of his class, next waiting in devoted readiness, as not knowing how soon his services might be required for the delicate baronet, who could not be expected to pass through so trying and vulgar an ordeal as this was without experiencing a corresponding reaction.

Mr. Barnard was looking thoughtfully down, as though tracing afar problems too momentous to permit of reply by mere ordinary jangling. This exasperated his volcanic antagonist, who was resolved upon goading this iron and seemingly invulnerable being to the combat.

"When I entered this house, Mr. Noel Barnard, it was with a devout longing for the opportunity of speaking my mind to you. I have been waiting for it. I am glad I can in the presence of two gentlemen brand you with the dastardly titles of Scoundrel, Swindler, Liar, and Murderer!"

Without, Simmons cut an ecstatic jig upon the sheepskin.

Within, three men looked at Herbert Garston; Sir Kinnaird timorously, Beresford Travers reprovingly, Noel Barnard—the least disturbed person in the Hall—curiously yet collectedly. Then, in measured tones infinitely more dangerous than anger, he answered,—

"Perhaps Mr. Garston will qualify, or account for, the epithets favoured with?"

"Certainly, sir,—without loss of time. You prove your claim to the first designation by having taken the advantage, when in a situation salaried and honourable, to insult a lady of the household; you were an infernal Scoundrel, sir, and met with your just deserts! To the second by enmeshing a gentleman, whom you had injured already, in a network of difficulty so complex that it brought about his ruin and enriched yourself, and crowned you a most consummate Swindler. To the third by blackening the name of a man whom, not because he was my best friend only, but because he was the purest, truest, most honourable, and most Christian man in Christendom, I will set straight before the world, so help me God! And to the last from the certain fact of your having been prime agent in effecting not only his destruction, but, also we believe, that of his wife and child!"

"Had you been distinguished at the bar, sir, you could not have delivered yourself with greater fluency: and although I fail to follow the sequence here and there, I have no wish to deny you full satisfaction resulting from the points of the brief. You will remember as a rule, invective weakens a case, because when an impassioned pleader darts after some lurid and to him irritating light, he leaves the level track, and while returning and recovering himself, opposing counsel possess the evident advantage contingent upon coolness. You

are, of course, aware of the homely but apt illustration of the bull whom the red shawl excites in so marked a manner—mind, I am not likening yourself to that rampant yet necessary quadruped, nor yet to that other useful but equally awkward animal, the British Ass!"

"Sir!" cried Mr. Garston, advancing threateningly close to his glacial enemy, feeling that he had exhausted his quiver, "I take the liberty of telling you, who are so partial to travesty of the law, that it is stronger than the most mocking of those who break it with impunity; and that ere long its unerring grip will be firm upon yourself. Understanding the subtle theory of tactics so admirably you will, perhaps, point out to me the clumsy art when an adversary shows his cards: but I will do this, and warn you that link by link I am picking up the chain you hang about those unfortunate enough to become your victims. Scotland Yard has not yet been taxed, sir, for a single official, nor shall it be, if I can prevent it: through regard for the feelings of Mr. Beresford Travers, who has suffered enough by your machinations. Alone, or aided by trusty friends—"

"And servants!" interposed the other, with quiet irony.

"By any, sir, who will aid me in this just cause,—shall retribution be brought about. Never fear, Mr. Noel Barnard; a man like Lionel Travers is not to be stricken down by human hand without Heaven avenging the foul wrong and raising those who may be but instruments, yet are all powerful in Higher hands."

"And yet," said the other musingly, "I have known the dead serve Heaven better than the living."

They heard, and thought long afterwards of the mystical words, unable to grasp any connective significance, or attach a bearing upon their subject.

"Have we done any good?" asked the old gentleman, his arm linked in that of his friend, as they were retracing their way down the road leading to the town. Fair blue above, the splendid drapery of autumn around, the air softly genial and laden with odorous decay.

"We have found that Dalton is our friend, and he will, I am convinced, opportunity serving, prove so!"

"Of that I am sure; alas, his power is but weak! He knows more of the nature and history of this man than he would disclose to us; and however elaborate and explicit a case, he would not undertake a system of espionage upon one of his own servants. Wrapped up in his sybaritic ease, and falling back upon those instincts of his breeding, he rather shuns and ignores the man than troubles about him."

"I don't know—once or twice when he appeared least attentive and most at ease, I noticed a painful twitching, as though himself suffering. Unlike you, my dear sir, I believe Sir Kinnaird's *insouciance* to be masquerading."

"Sir Kinnaird belongs to a later school, that I daresay occasionally adopts this effeminate escape from the unpleasant. I am more accustomed to a race looking trouble or villainy boldly in the face, and bravely grappling with it."

"More in my way, sir?" Looking at his friend with a humorous twinkle, and Mr. Travers could not resist laughing.

"You go to extremes, Garston, altogether exceed propriety in the enthusiasm of your warmth: and under influence of temporary excitement, forget prudence entirely."

"Ah, well, I admit the man did excite me; it would take more than we know of to excite him; but wait and see, there may be a stronger than either of us at work."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SEABOROUGH AFTER THE SEASON.

It was exceedingly quiet at Seaborough. Visitors had fled, extras were discharged from the two large hotels, hired bedsteads were returned to the furniture mart, machines were drawn up in line for the winter, humanity upon the shingle waxed sparse, the summer and autumn visitors' seasons were over for another year. It was far advanced in October: it was exceedingly quiet at Seaborough.

The subscription band had ceased to make the promenade agreeable, the flowers were passing away, dry leaves scampered before the wind, and waves breaking upon shore were large and fierce. A line of vacant seats, a stretch of lonely walk, a deserted succession of grass-laid, shrub-bounded enclosures. What dreary places they are; these lesser coast towns out of the season!

Still, people must eat, and drink, and dress,—the people who remain, who are there throughout the year, having settled and become native.

Thus the drapers were filling windows with seasonable dress-stuffs, with flannels, blankets, and scarlet hosen; while the grocers were clearing away grimy-looking sugar-loaves and other dirt-besprinkled provender telling of the passed season. It was all very still, and there was little business stirring anywhere in commercial localities; and, as a consequence, the good folks had more time to chatter; and chatter they did. It was something, indeed, (as Mrs. Tapper, of the Lindon Arms, remarked to Mrs. Wallis, the ironmonger's lady,) for their great Hall, after being closed, and haunted, and

shadowed from buttress to basement by mystery, and made the one show-place and attraction for strangers (and everybody knows how thirsty that sort of thing makes people), to be occupied by a posse of workmen who were modernizing and refitting the whole place. Why, Sleperton Green would lose its romantic association altogether, would degenerate to a mere village donkey-walk! Mrs. Tapper was disgusted, because it was not to be supposed my lady would have her beer at the Arms, or my lady's many servants be permitted to resort to the convivial shades of the hotel; at least it never had been so, and poor Tapper, when alive, had often said "as how the Hall was no good to nobody till it was empty." Another thing, neither Mrs. Tapper, nor Mrs. Wallis, nor yet Mrs. Rice the Sleperton grocer and post-mistress, were quite sure it was all right. Where had her ladyship sprung from all at once? Well, Mrs. Tapper had a sister who let apartments, and amongst other items of news contained in a recent letter (the sister resided in Brighton) was the history of this Queen of their Season; and how her ladyship was sovereigning it in Brighton, without an equal or even an attempt at rivalry; and this in the company of her father. "Now," said Mrs. Tapper with emphasis, "I want to know where his lordship is? I have always had a suspicion of his being hidden away in the building somewhere, and I do know Tapper one night saw a white-bearded, ghastly-looking figure, surrounded by a pale-blue light, and I should have spoken of it afore only Tapper said, 'Whatever you does, don't mention it; for they'd pull the place down to find out what it was, and we should lose the earning of many an honest penny.' Now, why does her ladyship come a upsetting the whole place if the mystery about his lordship isn't cleared up? I for one don't believe he's so far off as the very polite widow and very precise bailiff are so fond of making out."

Mrs. Wallis, who had done a brisk business in the way of nails, screws, tools, bars, bolts, locks, and other iron ware, thought it might do the village good, and certainly between seasons.

Altogether, the discussion ran high, and meantime the Manor House was undergoing its embellishment and general

renovation, curiously watched by the elegant widow and her son, who day by day saw, from the Cottage windows, the progress made.

"So, she is coming back!" Mrs. Vincent had said to herself, when the news first came, and the advance staff of artisans quickly followed. "She has the nerve to brazen it out and to return to the scene any other woman would avoid for ever; and she returns as Lady Lindon. There is some deep purpose in this. And all the years have failed to bring me what I looked for—*he* has *not* returned. Would that I knew of his whereabouts—knew the secret of the years! Where has he hidden himself for so long? Where hides he now? I think, nay, I know he always liked me; was not my sympathy ever to his hand? When he would casually allude to the icy hauteur of her ladyship, and describe all delicately the constant pain it caused him, was not my tenderest sympathy awakened, and did I not ever lend a sensitive ear? And he was grateful. He tried hard as man ever tried in this world to evoke some little affection and warmth in that frigid bosom; but she was ever the same, and told me one day she had never known what it was to feel interested in any one, let alone to like them. 'Of course I esteem Harold,' she said to me, 'his family is so unexceptionable.' And there it began and ended. The creature without family is pariah completely with Lady Lindon; she admits no degree. Well, I cannot boast of family, although we were always eminently genteel; but I do not think Lord Harold cares for that sort of thing. He has married into family, and I fancy once in a life is sufficient for a man of his calibre; perhaps next time, for a change, he would rather marry out of a family. But with all his splendid qualities and ideas of the romantic, he failed to come up to my calculation after the blow; and I certainly heightened the effect as artistically as possible, the more easily as he is one of those susceptibly jealous ones. I would have staked my little income upon the divorce; but no, he shrank either from the publicity or from inflicting pain upon her; yet surely did not preserve the ashes of his ridiculous and insensate love. Why, a man with his nice sense of honour should have gone at the case

with splendid dash, and have settled the woman for ever! And then—have married me—poor little Me, who have bestowed more devotion in a day than that iceberg in all the term of their wedded years. Well, Lorry, my darling, I have vowed that the rooms your feet have over-run so long shall be yours and mine, and, should no untoward accident intervene, I will keep my word. Now, this very reserve and seclusion on his part may betoken the treasuring of old recollections, and a painful clinging to sacred associations: if so, the embers of the love may want but little fanning; revive the love, the jealousy should follow; the open wound will make that certain. Get Helen here, alone with her establishment, exposed to all the gossip of the Green; open to all the stings of village scorpions; defenceless before the idle scandal of the town—none loving, most hating my proud false empress; *then* I will bring down the charming Minister who is taking all hearts captive, and whom, I doubt not, she knows well enough, seeing they share the sovereignty in that town *par excellence* of intrigue and fashion; and *I* noticed how he stood before her portrait, seemingly strangely moved by it. Oh, I will play upon the quivering lyre—his heart—until he is over head and ears in love with her; and then to disclose this second escapade to my lenient and relenting lord. Will there be no reward for all this faithful service? Ay, I should be Lady Lindon! *I will be.* And I think I see the way to securing this visit of the great preacher later on. These men of thought are easiest caught by little things—that child he was with and bestowed so much attention upon, the woman Blake's little girl, a tractable, pliable child enough, whom Lorry rather liked—I will invite her here for a month in the winter; the Cottage is cosy then, and she will love it; and she shall write to Westley Garland, begging him to come and see her, enclosing a pressing invitation from myself; and if this is one of those strong prepossessions I have known men of culture take—although I could never understand why, seeing the number of charming mademoiselles and madames waiting to be booked—he will come to a certainty. So I do think, my dear Mrs. Vincent, the winter will not be so uneventful after all."

Standing in the garden one morning, standing below the bower-like porch, handing her bird a piece of sugar, the quick ears of the lady detected the musical chime of bells approaching, and the fast trotting of a pair of ponies. "The Howards!" she said, going indoors and upstairs, "they may call;" and she rearranged the hair—very long and luxuriant hair it was, worn in a coil—which the rough wind had displaced. Yes, they had driven up to the gate, and, peeping round the curtain, she saw the spruce tiger at the ponies' heads, while the Major, with true officer's gallantry, assisted his imposing lady to alight. Now there was a vast difference in the style of these neighbourly and eminently genteel ladies. Whilst Mrs. Vincent, come upon her when one might, was the pink of most exquisite neatness and lady-like elegance, Mrs. Major Howard cultivated a far more elaborate *mode*, and was the super-essence of extreme grandeur. The robes Mrs. Major Howard adorned were made, she said, by the late costumier-artiste to the Empress Eugénie; the fur-jackets, which imparted so astonishing a set-off to the majestic carriage of this military lady, were made, she said, by the private furrier to the Empress of Russia; the magnificent conception in lace and feathers which Mrs. Major Howard entitled her *chapeau* was invariably made, she said, in Paris; she having so frequently to step in and out of her pony-carriage, the vulgar eye of Seaborough and Sleperton was dazzled by highly ornamental buckles upon the shoes, made purposely for her, said the lady, in Austria; altogether, to use Mrs. Major Howard's own words—"The *tout ensemble* is *un peu prodigue*." The English language, like its fashions, being too meagre for the lady, she affected foreign tongues, of which she spoke as many as the prowlers left at Babel after the dispersion of its architects. In earlier days Mrs. Major Howard had enjoyed life as a governess to a peculiarly restless family, who turned up one morning on the Andes and another on the Cordilleras, a family which from the head to the tail of it, lived a life of chronic fidgets: it really seeming as though there was not a square yard of habitable soil for them, this side of immensity. Now this ceaseless wandering and flitting from place to place

served to develope natural ability; and the lady, who, although inoculated with the true principles of an adventuress, was undeniably clever, had slight difficulty in making a brilliant alliance; which, to her disgust, proved anything but satisfactory, for the Major was over head and ears in debt, and so had remained ever since.

This was the leading lady of Scaborough, who had made a morning call at the Cottage.

To Mrs. Vincent came her maid, the very embodiment of neatness, bearing the lady's card; and Mrs. Vincent went downstairs to where the Major stood on the hearth-rug, as though putting himself upon drill, while his lady was seated widely outspread upon the sofa.

"How do, my dear? We haven't seen you for so long a time; the Major was getting anxious—now you know you were, you naughty man—well, and how do you do?"

"Very well, sit down; won't you take a chair, Major? Pleased to see you out this fine morning!"

"Keep to the regular exercise, my dear madam; to it I attribute the uniformly good health I, as you know, enjoy."

"We thought, perhaps, you would come and dine with us to-day!" said the Major's lady, "we shall but sit down to fowls and a shoulder of mutton, but you will pardon a profuse board, knowing we would if we could?"

"I shall be very pleased—"

"It is so good of you. Of course you come for the little quiet chat?" Mrs. Vincent bowed.

"Have you heard from Sir Charles Neville lately?"

"Not very," answered the Major's lady, a little confused; "he is hunting in Essex. Sir Charles has friends at Chelmsford, I believe!"

"Chelmsford," repeated the Major, standing full front, thumbs tucked in at the arm-holes of his vest, "wasn't I stationed there in fifty-eight—? Ah, no, I recollect—memory's going fast, Mrs. Howard—it was at Colchester; I remember we had a great field-day; wounded in the arm; Cambridge messed with us at the Garrison. Was it the Garrison or the *Cups*?

Politely sent inquiries in the morning!" and the Major took a pinch of snuff from the enamelled box presented to him, so he said, by Wellington.

"The Major will never forget the dear duke!" said Mrs. Howard devoutly; "*Memoria*, my dear, *memoria in æternâ!*"

Mrs Vincent nodded assentingly without being in the least aware of its meaning; she was at all times prepared to grapple with the lady's French, her Latin she could not touch.

"Then we may expect you?" said Mrs. Major Howard, rising with august state. "At half-past two for three!"

"I will be punctual!"

"I know you will—the dear Major is so very particular! The force of old habit: *qualis vita, finis ita:* the Major" (whispering to her friend) "is a strict disciplinarian, poor man! Alas, our lot is much changed since we have retired into private life!"

No one had ever quite known what regiment the ex-officer had been Major of; his usual reply, upon the question being incidently raised, was "Papers at the Horse-Guards, have 'em sent on to you!" and nobody receiving the papers, it was either concluded to have slipped the Major's memory, or that some little difficulty existed about removing the papers from the Horse-Guards. The majority of people had quite a hazy notion respecting that institution, and were rarely surprised the schedule of honour was not fortheoming.

Precise to time, Mrs. Vincent was at the Major's pretty house, just off the Marine Parade, at Seaborough; and there Mrs. Howard received her guest with the large assurance of a lady possessed of the original court presence and true *bon ton*.

The Major, seated upon a footstool, was teaching a remarkably ugly terrier to shoulder a musket, in the form of a desk-rule.

"Now, sir!" cried the Major, with the genuine military force, "shoulder—arms! Left wheel! Right about—face! Present! Fire!"

"Major, dear, pray don't make so much noise indoors; take a turn on the lawn; just time for drill before dinner! Poor

fellow!" as the Major dutifully called off his troop, "he *will* turn the drawing-room into a parade-ground! And now, dear, *how are* you? I am *so* glad you've run down to see me; for one can't talk before the men; and how proceeds the Hall?"

"The workmen are at it still; they will finish, I suppose, by December!"

"And then we shall see this paragon. I told the Major this morning he must prepare to see his poor wife eclipsed entirely. I support a great deal, dear, from the rude staring of these country-folk,—and it is very unpleasant being so stared at, isn't it? But after her ladyship arrives I hope they will have something else to attract their attention. I suppose she *is* very stylish, is she not?" and the lady bit viciously at her little finger nail.

"It is an eccentric style—rather heathenish!"

"Oh!" the military lady breathed again, "She does not presume to compete in the lists of fashion?"

"You have nothing to fear on that score! I shall be glad to hear what you think of her."

"Good figure, I dare say, tall, perhaps disposed to *embonpoint?*"

"Of course I cannot say, not having seen what changes time and—dissipation have worked. You will not be struck; good carriage, nothing else noticeable!"

At this moment the Major was seen to beat a hasty retreat from the field; a man appeared at the garden gate, Mrs. Major Howard arose with dignity and closed the door; the man walked as meaning business, and unpleasant business! Mrs. Major Howard bit her lip, and commenced to play upon the piano, but above all the sound of the music arose the disputing and querulous voice of the Major's creditor. "But I tell you I know he's at home, saw him enter the house. I'm not going till he comes to some definite arrangement about my little bill! I've been for it nigh upon a score of times now, and I don't mean to call no more; if that ain't settled this week, you just tell him it 'll be placed in other hands!" The martial tread of the Major resounded along the hall. "What is the matter, Tabitha?" called the Major. "Tell the man we

are not requiring any thing to-day!" The man put a foot forward, a knee, a nose; the man stood within the hall. "Ah, Mr. Smelt, you've called for that little matter of—of—you *did* send in the account, I think?" "Every week, sir, for ten months!" "Bless me, how thoughtful of you! Must have been mislaid. Tabitha, girl, Mr. Smelt's little bill—how is this? Have I not again and again impressed upon you the importance of system in the commissariat! These inaccuracies will occur, my dear sir, in the most exemplary of magazines" (this said confidentially), "but I am obliged by your calling—very, I will see they are filed, sir, for the future with regularity. Excuse me—kitchen chimney on fire," and the Major marched for that scene of action to the disregard of the unwelcome intruder.

"Pardon me, my dear, this will I know be of service!" and Mrs. Vincent pressed her purse upon the embarrassed lady.

"How kind you are!" kissing her; "How can we reward you for these repeated acts of goodness?"

"By not saying anything about them, dear. Look how good the Major is to Lorry; my boy is my weak point, those that are good to him are good to me, and I am of a grateful nature!"

"Dear creature!" murmured the Major's lady, nipping the purse to estimate its contents, then ringing the bell imperiously. Enter Tabitha.

"When any of the tradesmen come to the front door, Tabitha, tell them I do not permit parleying, they must go round to the kitchen. Let me know the amount of this person's bill!"

The martial tread again resounded, the Major had caught the cue.

"Yes, let me know the amount of this person's bill!" The Major loftily opened the purse. "State your demand, sir, without loss of time! And I will thank you, when sending for orders to-morrow, to send the back way; and—do be more careful about sending in those little bills! All despatches, Tabitha, should be laid upon the breakfast-table."

The fishmonger to the Guards having retired, satisfied, the Major politely tendered an arm to each lady, and led to dinner.

"My dear, you will take the bottom of the table, Mrs. Vincent perhaps will take this upon my right; we are glad to see you with us to day, ma'am. My dear, attention!"

The Major said grace, the ladies looked down.

"Let me assist you to a little piece off the breast, ma'am!"

"If you please. How well your ferns are looking!" to the Major's lady.

"Yes, dear, but we are afraid they won't survive the winter; the Major is *so* fond of flowers! Ah, my love, it shows a truly guileless spirit, such fondness for the vegetable kingdom!"

"I remember the old duke," said Major Howard, "never appeared in full regimentals without a sprig of rose, shamrock, and thistle in his coat. 'Howard, old boy,' he said to me one day, 'we'll stick to the symbols with the colours!'"

"Dear duke!" said Mrs Howard, wiping her eyes. "Ah, what the country, the nation, his private friends, lost in him!"

"A little gravy, ma'am! My dear, you have the bread-sauce, assist our friend. So sorry Master Lorry is not here!"

There was a violent ringing of the bell, and Tabitha, at the bidding of her master, hastened to learn the meaning of the untimely clamour, returning to say something in a low voice to the Major.

"Dear me, this is most unfortunate! The cover, please, and place my plate in the oven; really these people have no regard for one's feelings! A fellow about a paltry account for grocery. I declare I was going to put my hand on your purse, as though it were my own—do let me return it, or I am sure to make some absurd blunder—really."

"Pray do, Major! I am so pleased to be of service!"

"Well, now, I don't like, it is too imposing, don't you think so, my dear?"

"The Major is *so* delicate," murmured the Major's wife in her friend's ear, "he cannot bear to accept these little favours. I can see he is almost refusing. Shall I coax him?" The other

nodded, and the Major was coaxed, and yielded with the grace of a general.

"Help our friend to a little broccoli, my dear!"

"You will, *won't* you? Now *do*!" persuaded the Major's lady, sincerely feeling their visitor was entitled to it.

"Thank you, I will. And how are the birds, Major?" Major Howard possessed six canaries, which he had trained to go through drill and a variety of manœuvres.

"In first class condition, I am obliged; removed them to the back for the sun!"

"The dear man is *so* attached to the pretty things," said his lady in a low voice to her friend; "it displays such an innocent taste, and, one may say, in a military man, such tenderness of feeling."

"I suppose the Manor House will come out quite smart, ma'am, after all the doing up?"

"Yes, Major, it is being elaborately prepared for Lady Lindon—so much the more comfortable for her ladyship!" Mrs. Vincent, with infinite care and neatness, having set a tiny piece of the flower of her broccoli in a soft white bed of the bread-sauce, raised the same upon the plated prong to her mouth, permitting her piercing eyes to dwell an instant upon the liquidly expressive orbs of the Major's lady.

"Those set in high places have much to be thankful for; *we* thought so once, Major, but, alas! were not then sufficiently grateful for all we enjoyed!" and the lady straightened a ruffled piece of lace at her throat.

"Allow me to pass you the drum-stick, my dear?"

"Dear Major, he thinks he is carving turkey again."

And Mrs. Major Howard, overcome, but recovering herself, said, "No, Major, attend to our friend!"

"Tabitha, a hot plate for Mrs. Vincent, nay, no refusal," and the Major was making an onslaught upon the second fowl when he started as though galvanized.

"An ambuscade!" And the ex-officer laid down the carving knife and fork, while a tremendous ringing at the back and knocking at the front caused the ladies to look at one another, and the lady of fashion to sink back gaspingly.

"Oh, Major! I feel as though fainting, these terrible shocks are more than I can bear!"

"My angel!" cried the Major, quite broken down, standing over the stricken but still large form of his lady, while Tabitha entered with a hot plate and the information of two men at the back door and two at the front.

"Butcher, baker, greengrocer, and milkman!" muttered the officer, fanning his wife with the hot plate between the interjections. "What is to be done? I am desperate!"

"Major," said his lady solemnly, "this is a *coup de grâce*."

"My dear," said the Major penitently, "it is a judgment; we were not sufficiently grateful to our friend just now for that generous and sympathetic expression of her esteem!"

"Pray see to this, Major; there is yet sufficient in the purse to satisfy these troublesome people. I think you have it."

"I? Why, bless my soul! so I have; well, now, I don't know what my memory *is* coming to, my dear! No, Mrs. Vincent, I can't, I won't. I'm grateful, ma'am, on the honour of an officer and a gentleman, but I will not thus—show the persons into the parlour, Tabitha, I will be with them in an instant, this matter must be compromised, there is conspiracy; although unfortunate, I am not to be hounded to capitulation; let me prove to the foe that a servant, a subject of the Queen of England"—in his agitation the Major left the room, taking the purse with him.

"Dear Major!" gasped his lady, "is he not a treasure, is he not brave, confronting single-handed those fearful men?"

"Indeed he is!" responded the visitor, who, like her hostess, marked the removal of the purse in the absent-mindedness of the Major.

That individual returned, and sitting down, with a sigh of relief, said,—

"Say grace, my love?"

"Why, Major, we have not dined!"

"Bless my soul, no! Tabitha, the mutton!" in his emotion and forethought preserving an eye to the morrow, when Mr. and Mrs. Harry Abbott were invited to supper.

Thus in due time, when sweets and cheese, and dessert and wine, had served to complete the agreeable little dinner provided for their friend, it came to a close, as agreeable little dinners will; and the ladies sat down to needlework and a quiet chat, in the drawing-room. The Major, light-hearted again and almost boyish, returned to the lawn, where, sitting upon a chair, he, with his aviary upon another chair opposite to him, put his feathered corps through their exercises; fragments of the commandant's directions floating in now and then to that room where, over-canopied by lace, the ladies reclined by the window at their knitting.

"You have been so good to us to-day! What can I do?"

"Nothing, dear, at present; I will always ask you if there is anything."

"Do, there's a love! How nice you look to-day! Ah! How I wonder that you do not marry."

"Hush, not a word! Do you not know that my life is consecrated to my books, my pictures, and my music?"

"And to doing good!"

"Well, so far as in my humble capacity—"

"*Present!*" came from the lawn.

"Dear Major, he has the canaries in such discipline!" Mrs. Major Howard's knitting-pins chinked and jinked until they had the ring of specie.

"Well, and what are you going to do all the winter? remain in Seaborough?"

"I think so; it comes dreadfully expensive travelling, or I should feel thankful to get away; this place is horribly dull in the winter!"

"No town has its pleasure all the year round."

"A doubtful point, my love; look at Brighton to wit!"

"Not habitable in summer—a perfect furnace. By-the-bye, I suppose you've heard this famous Minister is paying rather marked attention to our coming grand lady?"

"Not a word of it; good gracious, and not divorced! So this is modern ministry, the reprobate!"

"Don't be harsh with him, they are two fascinating ones together! But it *is* hard for poor Lord Lindon!"

"Yes, if I ever pitied any one, I pity his Lordship!"

"And he stands so little chance beside this captivating fellow!"

"Oh, it is dreadful! Ah, my dear, why is our sex so weak?"

"Well, Lady Lindon is not one of the weak sort exactly, but you see Garland is such a dangerous character, and so nearly perfect, and so utterly unlike the rest of his sex in every respect, he is quite *irresistible!* I for one am not surprised to hear of it, but I believe he is the only living man who would ever have made an impression upon her ladyship; she is not what she was, although for that matter I do not believe she ever cared for that—but this is an old scandal, before your time, my dear!".

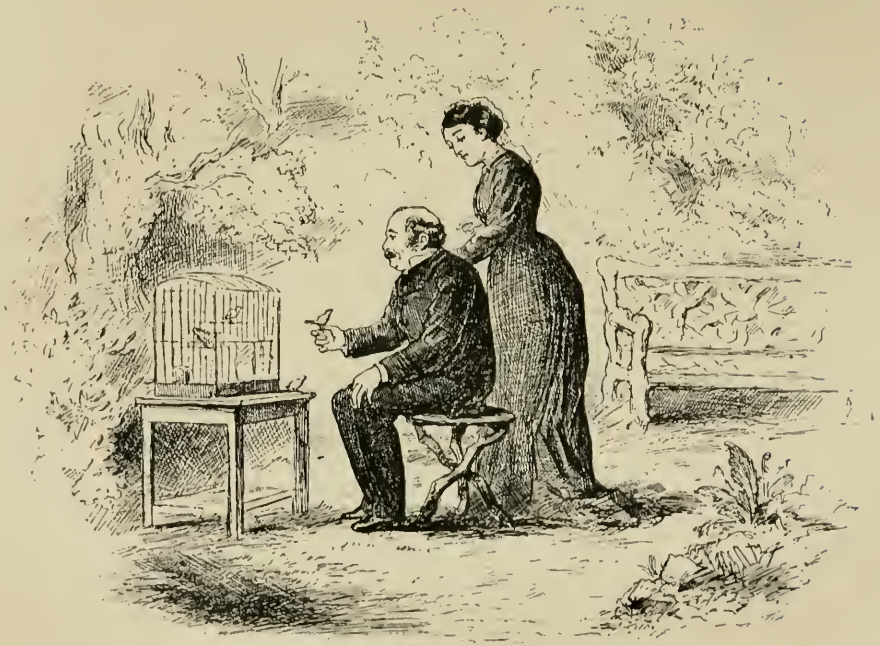
"Pray tell me all about it, I never did hear the rights of that story, and being *réchauffé* you will not mind; I am quite safe, my dear."

"*Reserve your charge!*" from the garden.

"He is so happy now," said the lady, smiling.

"Ah! I must go and have a look at the Major's birds," and there was a trail of grey silk upon the lawn, and a little white hand on the Major's shoulder where the elegant widow stood beside him with her charming—"Just come to see how the dickey-birds are going on!"

"Splendidly; do sit down!" The Major waved a hand to the garden-seat near by, and, taking one of the birds from the long cage before him, chirped it upon his forefinger. "This is my conquering hero, Wellington; head up, sir, face the lady!" The bird faced at command, and looked so ludicrous the lady smiled. The Major, taking another from the cage, introduced "Marshal Soult!" "Soult, attention, sir, bear the standard!" handing it his silver pencil-case, which the bird clutched by the claw. He then whistled and called "Ney!" when a sleek, light-coloured bird hopped to the summons, alighting upon the cuff of the Major's sleeve. This was followed by "Niel," by "Pelissier," and by "Saxe," described merely as *maréchals de camp*, the Major explaining with much politeness that the names, with the exception of that of his



"The Major, taking another from the cage, introduced 'Marshal Soult!'"—Page 334.

old friend Wellington, were bestowed out of compliment to Mrs. Howard, whose tastes were so essentially French.

Mrs. Howard came sweeping from the house,—"Not to hurry you away, dear, but I know you won't mind telling me if you will stay tea with us; I shall think it *so* kind if you will, but I wanted to know because our maid is going down town; I am sure you will approve my candour, and will tell me if you prefer sally-lun to muffins? So sorry to put it in this pointed manner."

"I cannot stay, dear!"

"Oh, but you must!"

"Certainly!" cried the Major.

"There! The Major says you are to, and you dare not disobey the Major!" and the Major's lady pretended to button a cuff, as much as to signify it was time to depart.

"I really cannot stay—many thanks, and I have a letter to write to Lorry, who I think I told you is in London for a month or so; a little change he was wanting; but the dear boy is there more for study than pleasure. He has a strong inclination for painting; I think if I let him have proper lessons he *will* one day paint."

"You paint, yourself, beautifully!" said Mrs. Howard, with sincerity; it was just praise, Mrs. Vincent being an exquisite artist.

"It would be the greatest joy of my life if Lorry were to turn out some day, a great painter; it is the one thing I have ever desired wealth for, that my boy might be so enabled to study under the best masters, and travel to lands where art creates art and cultivates excellence."

"Remember the great duke once saying to me, 'Howard, old boy, I've but one regret, you're not on my shield,' referring to the shield commemorative of his victories, presented to him by the bankers and merchants. Ah! it's a great art, preserving a record by feature, or scene, or incident, of that to live for ever—can't think what I was about *not* to be on the shield! But some people are always too late for everything. Tabitha!" called the Major to their domestic, "tell the boy to put the ponies in!"

And Mrs. Vincent was driven home at a fast trot, and with jingle of bells; village urchins coming forth in shoals to stare open-mouthed at the natty little concern, and at the "booful lady o' th' Cottage."

Home to a quieter tea, a thoughtful tea. And after tea to letter-writing.

And once or twice the lady went to the front door to look at the night, at the belt of dusky trees piercing the starry canopy, at the half-circle of lights where the cottages skirted the Green, and at the great house standing back with scaffolding and piles, and a red lantern where a watchman already slept.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

The dead leaves had a rare time of it upon Sleperton Green, when the wind scoured as it did the night Mrs. Vincent stood in her porch, watching the lights disappear one by one where the folk retired to their rest. It was a weird, scampering chase, that of the dry and brittle leaves; they frisked impudently around the watchman's legs, and smote his long drab coat, lodged on his old hat, and tickled him on the cheek, and all without waking him; they became ruby under glow of the lantern, and bronze below a light from the open door of the cottage, and ebon where by the great house they huddled close, as though timorous of their quarters.

At last all was dark around Sleperton Green, save for that red light swinging and swaying to the October wind.

Yonder, over the Green, a column or two of smoke, where in Sleperton village the goodwives busied at their husbands' suppers, after long work, or tramping it from market with the master's stock. Still in Sleperton village silence and darkness were prevailing. Beyond this, amongst the quaint red-bricked houses of Seaborough Old Town, more life was stirring; the blacksmith's forge was but just closing, and the bar-parlour of the small tavern was still filled with a roistering crew. Old Seaborough folk timed their rest by Dr. Poppington's school; exactly at half-past nine a bell rang dolorously, and soon a line of feeble glimmer gave form to the old historical barrack, scaring the owls from their ivied fastnesses; and, within ten minutes, all was dreary and still. Then the

goodman would say, "It's bed-time, old woman; the school-bell's gone this long while!" and would draw quicker whiffs at the pipe: and every night by ten the Old Town slept.

So it came about, as she knew very well, this widow-lady at the Cottage was the sole wakeful creature; her books, her work, kept her up until a late hour; but then, save for some stray gipsy or prowling poacher, there were none to see. Upon this night the lady softly closed her front door and secured it; then, as softly—for the very neat maid was asleep—went to her kitchen, and placed a light in the lantern she was accustomed to use when going to the Manor House at this hour; she shrouded it with the thick shawl wrapped about herself, and quitted the cottage by the back way, taking a leaf-strewn, bramble-grown path leading to the rear of the mansion.

Full soon would her run of the noble dwelling be at an end, and but the galling satisfaction remain of seeing a troop of others go in and out; not for an instant did she suppose Lady Lindon would resume that friendly intercourse previously existing between them, nor did she wish it.

How strange the place looked with great patches of white upon the floor; workmen's baskets, timber, braziers, glue, and paint; with scaffolding, carpenters' benches, and the joiners' implements; cans, bottles, and earthen pipkins of the stainers; with here a fire-stove waiting to be fixed, and there a cornice in process of re-gilding; an array of plates for the doors; and varnish for the grainers to make the panels lustrous. Here were boards taken up, there the wainscoting was taken down, for rats were many in the Manor House, and it was not to be expected her ladyship would submit to any annoyance of that sort. In one place the dividing wall between two rooms of moderate dimensions was removed—her ladyship's ideas of interior space were for anything but contracted areas; in another a ceiling had been raised to present more loftiness; all was confusion, as is inevitable under such circumstances; to be righted only when the united forces of Sleperton and Scaborough charwomen applied themselves vigorously to the task.

Some of the rooms were not to be touched, such as the large dining-room, the library, the double drawing-room, and the study, and those rooms were locked. The bunch of duplicate keys possessed by the lady admitted her to any of them, and she entered the room where that painting stood, like the haughty Helen herself. As she did so, she uttered a little cry of surprise: a man was standing before it, holding on high a light, the better to observe the picture; he extinguished the light in an instant, but not before she had recognized the features. There was a dead stillness for one moment; then, without raising her lantern, she said, with admirable calmness, thereby wishing to restore his presence of mind,—

"I—have—seen—you—Lord Harold. Do not fear; you can go and return as many times as it pleases you, and no word shall escape my lips to any save yourself. I knew you would come back—have expected you. Let me be your friend, as of old—if only in gratitude for your long kindness to us; here is my hand—will you not take it?—The hand of Anna Vincent."

There was such perfect silence, she became alarmed, and restlessly placed the lantern on the mantelpiece; its light fell across the dark oak panelling, upon the dense pile of the table-cover, and skins stretched upon the floor; but not upon the man returned to the scene of his grief, where he leaned back against the wall, scathed by the face limned with such cruel perfection—the face he had loved, had wooed to love, had died to the world for. He could not utter a word, though to thank her only, and the woman waited; he would be weak following upon this, all shaken; he would speak and he would listen all in good time; she was patient also, not speaking. She was conscious of muffled, strangled throes, that had not sound, but shook the space, bearing grim witness to the suffering; and she waited. Oh, he would be weaker after this, and need such soothing! She even turned the lantern round to give him more shade; he should have shade in plenty. Only wait till she was Lady Lindon, and see the myriad lights, though!

He came forward, taking her hand, saying in broken utterance, "Thanks, friend, you were ever considerate."

She placed her other hand upon his, and pressed it ever

so lightly, yet sufficient to express all her heartfelt sympathy; and she stood more in the light, that he might see how her face could interpret the feeling at her heart. A still attractive face, unlined, and with a bloom clear as at sixteen; her hair, as usual, in perfect order. Had Mrs. Vincent encountered a goblin her hair would have remained in perfect order.

"Rumour of this reached me; I only come to satisfy myself."

"And are you pleased, my lord?"

"I do not occupy the house; Lady Lindon may as well be here as not."

"It has struck you there may be some little sorrow at the bottom of this strange proceeding; is it not so? Perchance, repentance?"

And she knew that he quivered like the aspen, but he did not answer her.

"I confess," she continued, "it bears that aspect upon the face of it; but I cannot reconcile the thought that her ladyship is now a foremost, nay *the* foremost leader in Society."

"Her ladyship always took a foremost position in Society," replied Lord Lindon proudly. "It is nothing new."

"But it is, I think, new for her ladyship to hold her own as absolute monarch in the gay world; and this she is now doing in Brighton, where so complete is her sway, our literary Bayard, I am told, is all beside himself."

"What riddle is this? Whom do you style your literary Bayard?"

"What, *do* you not know—Garland, preacher and poet, Utopian philanthropist, and chevalier of distressed humanity!"

"I am sadly behind the times—have not heard the name before; but if he is that, the sooner he comes to Sleperton Manor the better." And with a half-moan the nobleman, wearily taking the light, said, "Let us go from this room; I have not seen the library—stands it where it did?"

"Untouched, save for the liberal use we have made of your permission to read the books."

He bowed with gracious pleasure, glad they had done so; and the two proceeded to the library.

Upon the table, central of the spacious chamber, were several works of recent date. He had not seen them, and looked at their backs curiously; men were represented there whom he had known, felt the cordial grasp of hand from some, possessed letters written by others; it was like coming back to life, this weird re-meeting with old worth.

The lady, taking up one of the books—a quietly yet richly bound copy—handed it to his lordship, with the simple remark, "Our Bayard's last, 'The Triumph of Seasons;' it is causing some stir just now."

"Thanks; I will read it." And the owner of the large library of old and valuable books lining the lofty walls walked slowly round, noting each change of position even after all that lapse of years. It is the one sad sensation the book-lover alone can know—abruptly parting with a rare and well-loved collection, and abruptly standing in their presence again after the interval which seems so interminable. It was with fond attention his lordship scanned each line and tier.

"I am glad to see the old friends again; truly did Johnson say, 'Books are faithful repositories, which may be awhile neglected or forgotten, but, when they are opened again, will again impart their instruction.'"

"It is a privilege we shall miss very much. When her ladyship arrives we shall be forced to turn again to our own modest collection."

"I will send you a parcel at intervals. I have some choice books of travel that will please your son."

"And *won't* you tell me where you are hiding yourself? Remember, not a soul shall know."

"Some day, perhaps;" kindly, gently, yet firmly said.

"Tell me now; why keep this a secret from *me?* If you but knew a tithe of what I have gone through in my solicitude, you would not hesitate like this."

"But why should I? I, dead to the world, and happily contented thus;" his thoughts wandering to his darling, the one comfort of many years, reared with such care, and guarded so jealously.

"Would you not care to learn how things are going—how

my lady is received, how she looks and acts, and if I see the shadow of a change, or least bias in your favour?"

"I should."

"Then let me write to you. I will furnish most faithful records of all you would care to know."

"I have a friend—an old country clergyman in the north; write me under cover to him."

She turned her head away as though aggrieved. "And am I so little worthy of your confidence? Time was when you thought differently. Ah, me! Absence makes esteem grow colder."

"Not so, my friend; and if I do not tell you, 'tis from no distrust; but I have resolved to live apart from all and every old association."

"Alone?" The keen eyes were upon him this time; and she noticed that he flushed and did not immediately reply.

"I understand," she murmured in a low and interested voice, "you are *not* alone."

"No. I am not alone."

"And *I admire* you for it, the wounded heart needed this; it is well. Is—is she *very* pretty? But *I know* she is, with your fastidious sense of beauty."

"Very beautiful; and as charming as she is beautiful."

"Oh! but you must tell me more now—tell me, that I too may love her."

"Little to tell, save that she has grown up beneath my care, so you may rest satisfied I shall never again suffer as I have suffered once; if you but knew, my friend, the intensity of my love for—"

"Yes?" Rapt, and with eagerness.

"What matter names? See, here is her portrait, I brought it to bear me company on my journey."

The lady looked long with a hard, critical look; the criticism came.

"Young! A good face, attractive, I should think, in the life; these firmer lines at the mouth denote—"

"Yes?" In his anxiety he stood up, and over her as she held the picture.

"*Faithlessness!*" And she laid it down as though it burnt her fingers, while he, clutching convulsively at her chair, gasped,—

"Whatever makes you think that?"

"Well, women, you know, can tell so quickly!" and she looked up coyly yet archly in his face, as though compromising herself by admitting so much. "Was I not the first to open your eyes to—to, you know?"

He nodded, with an expression of anguish.

"You must be careful."

"I have been careful; if you knew all, you would say so."

"Then tell me all; I may help you. I *can* sympathize with you; heart and soul I am one with all your plans."

He smiled sadly.

"In spite of my life's sorrow I am fortunate in finding sympathy with your sex. I have a most thoughtful person in my house who acts as her companion, and is truly mindful of my comfort; a gentlewoman like yourself, she has the same delicacy and forethought."

"I am very interested; tell me her name, that even I may think gratefully of one so mindful of yourself."

Holding the portrait to the light again, and narrowly examining certain traits, discoverable only to those of her ability perhaps, she added, "And your friend, this Mrs.—"

"Brandon."

"Is companion to Miss—"

"Lena St. Aubyn."

"Yes, and very nice; you must let me have this portrait to copy—no, don't refuse me, please—that I may look on it sometimes; love it for your sake."

The request was put in so tremulously tender a tone, and with such a world of womanly friendship underlying it, he consented to this also.

"And now tell me where I may send it to you. What, still hesitating? But you are not afraid that I shall steal your treasure?" (banteringly).

"No." And he told her. Then she thanked him, and wrote it upon a piece of paper, together with the names *Lena St.*

Aubyn and *Mrs. Brandon*. Then carefully, with characteristic neatness, she folded the picture up in a sheet of clean white paper, and placed it in her bosom.

"And now it is a mutual understanding between us; I am to write you all transpiring here, and you are to write me all your little hopes and fears."

"Agreed, my friend, 'twill serve to pass the winter pleasantly."

"Ay," she said in a hoarse voice, "pleasantly."

"You have a cold."

"What else can I expect with half the walls down; but I must be going; so sorry I cannot ask you to the Cottage, which would be more comfortable—"

"Thanks, this will do; I would rather pass the night in my home; my fathers' home. Good night, may you be recompensed for all!"

"I hope so," said the lady to herself devoutly, while she wrapped the shawl about her, and quickly passed over the ground home.

First, the veriest mixing of brandy and water, where, in a precise little glass, the spirit and the sugar and the water were arranged with the utmost neatness; next, to add a postscript to Lorry's letter, of which the unusual feature was presented of a postscript thrice the length of the letter, the closing lines being,—

"I will send the portrait to-morrow, and you must study it carefully. You know your course, follow it; first find the girl out, next win her love; and I think it will not be half distasteful to you. Leave all the rest to me. Good night, may all guardian Angels watch over and prosper you, and preserve you virtuous and good. Your loving and devoted mother, A. V."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE DEALER IN FOREIGN BIRDS.

October: Brighton very full: one of the most crowded seasons for years; the King's Road in the afternoon a busy scene of comfortable wealth: pathways thronged, and the drive a block of carriages. It was rather chilly on the piers; besides nobody walked on the piers in the afternoon, keeping to the paved boulevard alongside the shops. Upon a sunny afternoon, more ancient families, more aristocratic men, and well-dressed women, were here to be seen than anywhere else in Her Majesty's dominions. A continuous stream of carriages, some of new and somewhat rakish build, some that had belonged to the fathers and had come down with the rest of the property, some of quiet, unobtrusive elegance, and many panelled with the noblest heraldic ensigns of England: horses, sleek, glossy, the handsomest to be found upon a road; dogs on the easy trot behind, or seated impudently in the vehicles: little dogs and big dogs, and dogs that were no dogs at all, being merely balls of fluffy whiteness. What a panorama of life—of life in high places! And to be sure there was a glimpse here and there of quite a different stratum—just a hint of some other order of which these knew little: the girl with the basket of roses, the man with the penny hat-guards, the respected firm with the Punch and Judy, the old dame with the lace, the merchant in brandy-balls, the blind man, the fancier with toy puppies, and a man driving a truck along, a small platform-truck with a ledge, and upon it a wall of diminutive cages, wherein fluttered and piped, as not liking the noise, a quantity of feathered captives. The man wheeling this concern before him was not of prepossessing visage, he had the outward

and visible sign of the P.R., and a cast and bust popularly described as of the bull design; his caravan bore upon its seasoned side this inscript:—

JOHN BEECH,
DEALER IN FOREIGN BIRDS,
106, VINEGAR STREET,
HACKNEY ROAD,
LONDON.

Times had been bad with Mr. Beech! One day on London Bridge he met another gentleman—a gentleman in the penny-whip line. There was fraternal feeling between these two, and they celebrated the meeting at the nearest public-house; there Mr. Beech disclosed that he was "down on his luck, and didn't know what to make out o' the cussed City!" Whereupon the other gentleman, who also was destitute of prepossessing attractions, said ferociously, "I never knowed no good come of it yet; it's too chuck full o' they furreners!"

"Himported two an' a 'alf dozen from Lea Bridge this werry week, most on Sunday!" And having thus reproachfully vindicated the foreign interests, Mr. Beech buried the echo in the recesses of a pewter pot.

"It's the warments from the Continent as is taking money out o' the pockets o' the 'onest! But I 'ad the crackest time as ever I 'ad in my purfession down at Brighton yonder; that's whur the folks spend the money an' no mistake!" And the Foreign Dealer caught at it, and thought to do a thriving business, once get to Brighton; so to Brighton he came, leaving the establishment in Vinegar Street, with its sundry accumulation of horrors, in the experienced hands of Mr. John Beech, junior: an emphatic repetition of the dealer, with the heightening conferred by a protracted penal graduation. It may be mentioned there was also contingent upon the establishment in Vinegar Street, a Mrs. John Beech, senior, and a Mrs. John Beech, junior, likewise not characterized by either the graces which adorn or the beauties which embellish the poetical form of woman. The elder Mrs. John Beech had been married

to her present lawful husband exactly thirty years, and every day of every year of the thirty the grace before meat had been a most furious quarrel. Mr. and Mrs. John Beech, junior, settled their little differences at the same time in another part of the room; thus the abode in no sense partook of the character of a Quaker settlement. Mrs. John Beech, senior, had cause for discontent, even for expression of that discontent, since her husband, her son, and her son's wife, were ever arrayed in battle against her; the poor soul had a sorry time of it, her hair was grey, her face was wrinkled, and the years were going, and never a kind word out of any of them; but she still fought with the best—all her sex of Vinegar Street were afraid of her—would fight to the end. Bird-seed, and she had little else, developed the muscle, and this cadaverous female fought like a trooper. Her daughter-in-law spent most of her time in the street; she had as distinctively *al fresco* a taste as any ruddy-faced daughter of Epsom; a vagrant, roving, conversational, thirsty, and warlike taste it was. The Beeches, perhaps, were neither better nor worse than their neighbours, but they certainly made their existence more palpable at least to the sense of hearing. It is not a gratifying picture, and our lines have fallen upon anything but pleasant places, yet such was the abode of ornithology this dealer had temporarily departed from. And he had been doing uncommonly well in the wealthy southern town, making money fast, so many bringing little ones here with whom to wish was to have.

And there was a particular little one whose name was Rose, with whom especially to wish was to have, in so far as a tall and stately friend was concerned. Thus when Rose wished for canaries as companions for her love-birds, no promise was made, as was usual with him, but mental note was taken, and the wish would be borne in mind until realized. Therefore when Mr. Garland (who would rather deal with such than at the rented and taxed fine shops, where they knew him by sight, and would go upon some excuse to their inner rooms and bring the rude to stare between tiers of cages) met the Dealer in Foreign Birds, he hailed him, desiring he would call at

his house in the evening, which the dealer, touching his rabbit-skin cap, thankfully promised, and was there to time with his varied collection. The gentleman saw the man in the servants' hall, where the cages were ranged upon a sideboard.

"You guarantee these are from the Canaries, my friend?"

"On my solemn hoath an' davy, yer worship!" The dealer conferred this title from awesome recollections of a magistrate before whom he was once cajoled by over-persuasive officers, and who wore a white neckcloth.

The Minister took one of the birds from its cage with exquisite tenderness. Upon the mantelpiece was a saucer containing some liquid and a brush; he passed this lightly over the wing, and so quickly and carefully as not even to alarm the little captive, which so far from fluttering with extremity of fear at the unwonted procedure, rested calmly peaceful: it is all in the touch, as Beethoven said. The dealer watched the operation with fuming dismay, and shuffled about, looking uneasily towards the door and thinking this grave, methodical exposer of his rascality more like the magistrate than ever. Mr. Garland returned him the bird with one wing brown and the other wing yellow; still he did not look stern and severe, did not flash fine and imprisonment out of one eye, and ruin with starvation out of the other. To the man's amazement the Minister's eyes looked kindly, although sadly, upon him, while a softened light, scarcely a smile, yet very pleasant upon the handsome face, changed the whole aspect: and the man, instead of feeling brow-beaten and discomforted, not to say frightened, was at ease, although overcome by astonishment. The Minister, with hands behind him, looking carelessly at the line of cages, then asked the man, kindly beyond description,—

"Did you ever try to get an honest living?"

"Times out o' number, yer honour; an' the fust I went to jist looked at me an' says, 'Take on a 'ang-dog feller like you, why, it's on yer face that ye're born to be 'anged!' I says, 'Thank ye!' and was 'spectful, though I'd like to a 'ad him out on Plaistow marshes some Sunday mornen; and the

next I went to for work called th' overseer, and bade him 'turn the gaol-bird out o' the yard!' only cos my 'air was cropped so short, yer honour, which I allow come of being convicted, and I an' a pal serving fourteen year; but as the good chaplain said, only the day afore we left, 'There's many a year afore ye yet, and, I 'ope, a 'onest life,' and it's hard I've tried to gain sich!" He was passing his arm briskly over the rabbit-skin cap as though refurbishing the constitution.

"I believe this land to be a difficult one in which to regain the honest standing, once lost!"

"An' when you never 'ad none, as I never 'ad, it's double-some dif'cult! But I'm sorry, an' certain, to a' put some o' the natives in the lot I brought yer honour to chuse from; it's 'ere is the African, and gems they be!"

Therewith he brought forward three birds satisfying the representation in every way, and these the Minister purchased, also the entire stock of coloured ones, with the remark, "I suppose in the case of a shower of rain the birds will return to their old form?" The man nodded. He could afford to act truthfully with this munificent patron.

"Now," said the Minister, purchase and payment effected, "I have no possible interest in advising you upon anything; but as a man with feeling I do offer you this friendly caution, and it bears its own encouragement along with it; try again what honesty, and with honesty truth, will do for you, and if you meet with similar rebuff, try again, and go on trying till the last penny is spent; then—well, come to me, and you shall have a pound or two towards helping you still to try on! There, never mind the thanks, my friend, to me: thank Him who enables me, sometimes, to be of some such use as this!"

With a courteous bow the Minister left the hall, the dealer standing dumbfounded with the first kind words that had ever encouraged him to better deeds; always excepting those of the chaplain at the penal settlement, whose words, uttered to all alike, if pointing the way, yet lacked the grand humanity witnessed here. And one of the maids held the door for the dealer to pass out, not with servant's impudence, but with

kindly civility. It was with a peculiarly softened expression the man looked back at the Minister's house. So far as we know, it might have been with veneration, with gratitude.

"I'll be kinder to the wife arter this!" he muttered, jogging on with the empty truck.

Meantime the Minister had opened the doors of the cages and set the feathered colony at liberty, all but the canaries, which he knew would fall upon ill-fortune in the colder land. While opening the door of the last of the cages, after the others had flown, the inmate, startled maybe at its sudden liberty, fluttered to his vest, and nestled there. "Oh, that I had wings as a bird," he said, while tenderly removing it, and opening his hand to the serene depth of blue, where the evening star—the star of hope—shone its luminous invitation, "for then would I flee away, and be at rest."

Next time Rose came, the gift awaited her, and highly delighted the child appeared. "They shall be taken to our house, where they will have more sun and air." She alluded to Mr. Blake's country house out Bramber way, some ten miles off, the well-to-do chemist, like many another worthy councillor, possessing his comfortable country residence. It was here those ponies were which Mrs. Blake had so longed to improve her state withal; it was here Rose caught the bloom of the flower of her name, and passed all her happiest home-time. A modern dwelling, yet overspread with the cheery ivy, and with valuable garden-ground encircling; a dwelling bespeaking affluence, where, as the lady observed, "a Duchess might be content to live;" and looking well from the road, a great point with Mrs. Blake, to whom such perspective was second only to comfort; and reading imposing in reports, with Joseph Blake, Esq., Ivy House, as the donor of a church subscription, or chairman of the District Board: which reports Mrs. Blake used to keep, folded up in the linen-press, with lavender, to impart a country odour, and musk to keep off the moth. Imposing also on the green gate-posts, where to the fore the legend ran,—

Ivy House.
Visitors.

And to the rear,—

IVY HOUSE.

SERVANTS.

Thus "our house" was an institution in the Blake family, and was said to be supported in style. Quite recently a page-boy had been added, and little Rose, with the true child's appetite for novelties, was full of the page that afternoon of calling to see her birds; and it was this for him to do, and that for him to do, and he was so good he would do anything for her, and the rest. To all of which the preacher listened with the gentle attention always displayed when the child was talking, but with a sadder shade than ordinary passing subtly athwart the brow.

The reigning favourite was conspicuous by his absence on the King's Road. Come upon him, unexpectedly, where one would, it was never there. Once a lady said to him, "We never see you on the road!" He replied, "My study and parish really occupy too much of my time." It was no wonder; the world was his study, the world his parish; and so long as a broken heart was needing solace, an impoverished family needing help, an imprudent youth or maiden needing guidance, a sick person needing medicine and nourishment, and talking to and reading to, and cheering up, so long his absence would be conspicuous from that or any pleasure-track. He dared not be idle, first, from principle; next, from fear; for to be idle was to brood, ever a dangerous expedient with so finely strung a soul, and with one so disposed to look back mournfully upon a procession of past sorrows.

One of the distinguished patronesses of the road had, however, returned to it—Lady Guilmere; and the sight of the lady gladdened many choice friends who had not thought to see her there again. Her ladyship was one of the most charming representatives of high life to be met with in the drawing-rooms; not beautiful: little in that face save its nobility and genuineness: yet how excellent an union! Not young: her ladyship was advanced in life, yet wore her years with such placid and happy quietness, they seemed half afraid to touch this

gracious gentlewoman. Not dressy, her ladyship dressed others, and was content herself with unassuming gear. By no one who heard the marvellous eloquence, by no one who read the impassioned writings, was the Minister more truly esteemed and beloved than by this refined gentlewoman, whose one word of heart-felt commendation outweighed a crowded room's applause.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"I CLING TILL I DIE."

Close upon the solitude of the far-reaching downs stood an old black cottage, and a garden where herbs and grasses flourished, and a few vegetables. It was all very poor and comfortless, and the last place where one would expect to find books and other evidences of scholarship; yet on a rude table there was a roll of writing, and against the bare walls some deal shelves, whereon stood ancient volumes, mostly upon Botany. A mere earthen floor, holes in the roof, and a rent in the door; yet writing materials and sundry worn appliances of studious hours.

An old man's coat was hanging beside the patched jacket of a boy. The writing on the roll was difficult to decipher; parts where the writer's hand had been very tremulous; parts where the ink was blurred by tear-stains.

And the writing ran:—"Why is it Age is bitter? If by chance I walk through the streets of the town, after one of my long rambles, or to sell the herbs at the chemist's, the young people are rude to me, thinking, perhaps, I do not notice it, or do not feel it; they jeer at the figure I cut, call me scarecrow, and grimace at these wrinkles. I see all, but take no notice; the Lord bears witness. Outside, the boys are ready with their shouting, 'Old Rag-picker!' I am no rag-picker. 'Old Jew!' I am no Jew. Poor, through love of my science, which has been more to me than wealth; very poor. And old: yet I see not why Age should be so bitter. Poor and old, that's it. A mended coat; and, as I live, another hole to-day; split again, well as I darned away at that rent while Arthur slept.

"I don't so much mind what they say when I am alone, but it tortures me if he hears: lest it warp the love.

"The rough lads throw stones at our poor cottage, but Arthur and I do not care, we are *together*. Great storms of stones might come, and, so they did not divide us, well: the boy's love makes the old man strong, patient, courageous.

"They say I starve him, and myself too, on the green food; after all, what matters their idle talk? We know. Very happy, we need not care; yet one broods upon it. Some such wicked word may one day make the lad change. I hang so on his happiness with me, it keeps life in my old heart; to see him gambol on the downs to-day almost made me young again; so tender! 'Lean on me, grandfather! How you are shaking!' And the arms will twine about me, gentle as a girl's.

"It seems rather hard to us now and then, that big town being so full of wealth and we so poor, and my loving lad is well-nigh jacket-less; well, we will mend and mend the old one: old, but precious, every shred of it, from being so long worn by him.

"I have given up clinging to my Book; it lies there on the shelf, getting yellow and seared as the wood-side leaves between its pages; yet the hours and days and years I have spent upon it, leaned on it, cherished hope of it! Unknown, a quarter of a life under the faded sheets, and all the fruit of all my labour. One day when I am gone it may be known, taken in hand by those who will esteem it for what it teaches; and it will benefit Arthur, so I will not repine. Yet, for all that, it's sad to see it there, loving it next the boy; and it brings back remembrance of his mother, dear as my very soul. I cry over it still, but cling to it no longer.

"To-day, crossing a square in the town, nurse-girls drew their little charges away with, 'Old Bogie, dears, eats little children!' and ran by mockingly. I would not let any see the depth of my wound, for I love the children all. I toiled home painfully, and found Arthur hoeing at the bit of ground, and I never kissed him as warmly. Despised, I am comforted; his love soothes, his tenderness heals; God bless his sun-burned beauty, and clustering curls graceful as the ferns of autumn.

"It was a poor place to bring the child to, when their home was broken up, and my daughter departed for Australia, but he did not seem to mind, and has learned to love it and his old grandfather wonderfully. I somehow never thought she would come back when I took the lad. She was always a restless one, was Mary; and now I hope she won't, if it's to take the lad away; it would be death to part with him after all these years. Mercy, how the wind blows! Another piece of the roof off!

"When the wind blows shrill, and pierces the chinks and crannies I am for ever trying to repair, we just gather close for warmth, glad of our shelter, begrudging nobody a better. If rain comes in, we shift our seats, and place a bowl to catch it, feeling grateful to the Lord for softer water which makes mellower tea of our herbs. We make the best of everything: we are *together!*

"What if we are ridiculous figures? It is something to live to cause laughter; and doubtless many a dainty dame does not laugh any too much; so we do good in our humble way, and are happy to be of service.

"People think me dry and withered as yonder bunches hanging from the roof; that does not matter; there are those about, poor old souls, whom doctors never visit, that bless our coming, and think me anything but dead to feeling. No, perhaps it would be better if I could feel a little less; Age is all too feeling, and this is why Age is bitter.

"The other day a good man looked in, he asked my name and where I went to church. 'Nowhere,' I said; then he was good enough to appear shocked; to tell me I was chief of sinners, and to pronounce me damned. I thought it harsh, but took no heed, for I was trimming our lavender, and the sweetness of its breath seemed to set all right. I bowed respectfully, and removed the old cap as in presence of the priest; but yon great hill is our church, and I want no other music to take me near to Heaven than the music of my young boy's voice. The rest I leave to Him who made that priest as well as me.

"Sometimes, watching Arthur in his sleep, tired, I doze, and

dream that I am rich, and can clothe him well, and buy him books; and sometimes that I am poor, and he is discontented, and would be away, and has longing for other faces: and I start as men awake from sleep of the white poppy, faint as one coming forth from fever: and I kneel by the old straw mattress with such dread yearning, one would think it had been reality.

"Young plants *will* trail from the stem. I have been more moved than usual by a slender circumstance that yet weighs upon my spirits. I sometimes send the boy down to the shop where my herbs are taken; he has but to leave them and receive the payment. A few days since, some one at the shop spoke rudely to him, with a coarse comment upon his length of hair: the little daughter of the house in hiding by the desk overheard, and, coming forth, beaming with smiles, and most kind consolation, gave him more than the worth of the herbs, and made all worth seem valueless in his young foolish eyes, —my poor, poor child! Taken by the soft light in her eyes, he came home to me for the first time thoughtful. I felt chilled. It was wrong of me, perhaps; but, oh, my love for my darling passes estimation by common laws! I was digging mould about the marjoram beds. 'Come and help me, Arthur,' said I gently, and he obeyed with the old sweet obedience, but this time without looking up in my face with that light I love so well: the pleasant smile that, seen below the sunset-flush, always makes me think of those upon the golden shore; he did not speak, went to work indifferently, and presently left the spade, and went and sat down in the cottage. I watched it all from under the brim of my old straw hat. I felt dreadful pain, and went on digging as though digging my grave. When twilight came I taxed him kindly,—'What is it, Arthur, dear; don't mind telling me, do ye?' Pressing it half carelessly, half earnestly, but with a silent prayer that it might be nothing; it came out with his own innocent candour, but with a deepened colour, that even in the twilight glowed upon me with its fatal beauty. I would not let him know the pain or see the tears; and, twining our creeper by the door, entered into his boyish feeling with my old heart wrung afresh at each new charm, described so rapidly when he found me a

gentle confidant. I reasoned with him, yet most lovingly and firmly, as the strength was given me. It caused me more emotion, knowing the thing to be natural, but I said, 'Love the plants a little longer, Arthur; they are God's young, and will never fail you as the young of men are like to do; never build your happiness on such; avoid the town, my dear, the further from it and the higher upon these hills, the nearer to Heaven'! He went to bed early, with heightened colour, and, all the long hours I sat by him, watching, was restless. Next day he went on the downs to get me some roots from amongst the furze plants where the wild violets grow. It seemed to me he was longer gone than of yore, and I could not work. I kept looking up the hill, straining my eyes to catch the distant glimpse of his coming back with basket and book as usual. Presently he came, running joyously, and bounded in with the news that he had seen her; she had been there at play with other companions, and had wished him a sweet good-morning! It was nothing, I laughed it off; but sitting that evening reading while he slept, I heard him whisper her name, and it chilled me more than all the gusts of wind that ever howled about the cottage. I have no Bible. I use an old Milton I bought for fourpence in the market, in its place. I went to it for comfort, but only found the old sadness over again, of cherished ones turning ingrates, and wounding those that had lived but in their truth. I have not moved much in the world of men, but I know the ending to be ever the same. I would not have my courtly lad befooled by the silk-frocked Miss of a wealthy trader, who would toss him to the winds scouring the downland without so much as a farewell. But my darling and I must suffer, because forsooth his fancy has fallen upon this pretty child of the town. Her father is a man of station among his fellows, and would be much put out to know his daughter had spoken with a ragamuffin. Yet it was only to-day, the very man, walking up here, came and asked me about the pains in my back, kindly promising to send me an embrocation. (It would have made me upright, had he said his child was gone to France, to school.) My boy came running out, and doffed his cap to this great man. 'A pretty

lad, my friend! I'm wanting a page at my country house, which, you know, lies some ten good miles out. Let him come, and I will treat him well; what say you, boy, could you wait at table? Would you like the life? A little polishing, old friend, to erase effects of early training, and the boy might suit us very well: and be a good thing for himself; it's a thousand pities he should be brought up like this! You won't stand in the way of your boy's advancement, I hope?' 'This is rather sudden, sir,' I murmured, clearly as my trembling would permit; my head was bowed, for I was crushed. He did not notice it, would have scouted the idea; I continued my digging, vigorously, feeling thankful I was upon it when he called; dug my agony down, and shovelled mould thereon, and planted rue, while awaiting to hear what my boy would say, for I had left it with him.

"'I will not stand in the way of my boy's advancement, sir; let him decide between us.'

"And I would not look up, even if I had the strength, lest my darling should be influenced; but that moment I could not dig, these hands were powerless to raise the spade. How I trembled to catch the tone of his voice; how long it was in breaking upon me! I think it was a struggle with him; then I heard this, hesitating and falteringly,—

"'I should like it, sir, so my grandfather's willing.'

"I wanted something from the cottage, and went indoors. How different it looked! I heard him say, 'Well, I'll send you some clothes with your grandfather's embrocation, to-morrow morning,' and he called 'Good day' to me, but I could not answer; and then he strode off with heavy gold at play upon his spotless vest, and such an air as to say, 'Another of Creation's blunders about righted, I think!' while I sat stupified on this old stool, leaning elbows on table, face buried in my hands; until I felt *his* arms about me; and then I thrilled, but only to become icy cold all over.

"It all happened so quickly; just that walking up my little path, those few words, and all the old happy time was ages behind. I shrank from his caress of half remorse, lest yielding to it I should give way utterly—"

A break in the writing, a half-finished page, even the mark where the pen had fallen from the writer's hand upon the paper.

Strange loneliness in the place. The wind stirring the little jacket and rustling it against the old coat, as though it would creep therein and nestle. Bunches of dried herbs swaying disconsolately, as though searching for an accustomed hand. A spade, a stool, a tattered "Milton," with some wild flowers between the pages, and a trail of ivy.

The remainder of the writing :—

"When, years ago, the first blow of my daughter's loss fell upon me, and left a loneliness so bitter it seemed no other would ever fill the void, I turned instinctively to my science; for the lone country walks seemed more in harmony with my darkened solitude of soul. Mary had seldom accompanied me in the old days, and there was nothing to recall her; but the boy has always been my companion; we have rambled over the hills and through lanes and woods until every bush and plant is a symbol of his presence. How can I ever go one of those walks again? His young bright eyes have sought my choicest treasures—those hanging on the wall with yellow tickets are all of his finding. I have never sold those; they are very dry, almost shrivel at the touch, and the writing on their labels has faded away; but much as I need money I will not sell those, for theirs is a language deeper than Botany. And I am an old man since I hung them there; they called me old then: 'Old weed-picker,' boys of the township shouted. It was not true, but no matter now. *He* made the youth, and kept the life in my heart, and now—

"Mercy, how the wind flickers this poor light! And my fingers are numb with cold. I used to notice neither. It is horrible now I am all alone. I might die; not a soul to hear my prayer that he should be kept in ignorance; not a hand to place his little coat beside me on the bed. I have put it by the fire with his shoes, as I used to do when he ran in wet; I talk to them, saying, 'Arthur will soon come; Arthur will soon come!' Oh, my heart so yearns over them, God help me! Yet these holes in the dear old boots. And I couldn't mend them,

try I never so deftly. It was better, Arthur; thou wast in the right, my love!

"No little hand to be laid again upon my shoulder, while the pretty face makes the cottage brighter than a palace. I cover his bed while I sit writing here; my eyes *will* wander to where they used to rest upon the straggling curls, and cheeks flushed by dreams; and now the cold bare wall, the dim, drear couch! No boyish play of swift young feet pattering upon the floor will awaken me to-morrow. I can scarcely think him gone; the very flowers he gathered last are hardly withered. I try not to see his jacket hanging upon the peg when I come in, tired, and worried by the lads shouting, 'Where's yer boy, Master? Starved yer boy? Sold yer boy? Where's curly-head, Master?' Now, indeed, I dread to hear the stones they throw upon the roof, and the gusts of wind tearing through the split walls; but *he* is in the warm, and in comfort. Ah, me! I suppose he often sees the pretty child; my moth will flutter around until scorched; then his thoughts will return to me, and until then —I shall be forgotten.

"I shudder to set foot beyond my bit of garden ground; I am sure to see fair boys at pleasant play, and these recall mine own. Sometimes a page-boy from one of the large houses crosses my path—he cannot understand why I draw my hand across my eyes and hurry on. He is so like my Arthur. I looked so long and wistfully upon him once, in a sort of daze, that he came up and asked me if I'd called him; many people were about or I must have stooped to kiss him, I hungered for it so.

"I am trying to bear my trouble, but I have not the strength I had; it is harder even than I feared; but it is for his sake.

"I wonder if he ever thinks of me? I would not have him know how much I think of him. It would spoil the contentment of his now attractive life. I must suffer in silence and solitude. It is better than worrying any with my foolish old repining.

"Dare I write it?—I am sorry now I consented, even though to benefit him; there was time for this after I was dead and gone. How I wish I could remember that part of the Word

which tells of when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl is broken, when the keepers of the house do tremble, and those that look out of the windows are darkened. Nobody would lend an old man like me the Word to copy it, I doubt. I'm in nobody's parish save the rook's.

"Dear little sock!—He wore it. My God, how I loved Mary's boy!

"The Book—my learning and my ruin, my half-treasure, the labour of my life—oh, what is it to my living joy! I would give it, my all, myself, myself, for but one more year, one other year with him, with all the love restored, as it used to be! Ah, blood upon my lip? I will write no more to-night. I think an aged heart breaks easier than men deem likely."

"Lest Mary returns when I am gone, and seeks her lad, I still write more. I had thought last night to have sealed up the sheets. It is well Mary should know, and that he is happy, and cared for, and how the old, forsaken man sacrificed himself for love of hers.

"Think of me, Mary, if you ever read this, as you never thought of me before! Think of me with pity! He has gone, Mary; gone! Will never return to me as of old; do they ever, once the tie is snapped? Did *you?*

"This day I made the weary pilgrimage only to see the back of that large house where he has gone; it was a toilsome way, but I kept thinking of his angel face; one glimpse and I would have lived anew, but they set the dog on me for a tramp, and —I—saw—him—not. Oh, the horrible drag back to this poor place; and now, to-night, the still more utter loneliness! I *must* see him once again. If I could but do so without his knowing it, for I dread unsettling him now. He would grow restless and unhappy. I have it! Night!

"I can conceal myself within the garden shrubbery; perhaps he draws down the blinds; I may see him thus.

"With what strength I cling to this! Would I could put the yearning far apart. God will sustain me; I *am* to see my boy again!

"But what a walk! How dark and lonely! Already the shadows seem darkening, and I feel I shall never see the little cottage more, and that this will be my last look upon the darling face. I am not sad so I do but see him—shall I, shall I?—What miles of suspense! I will kneel and pray that my strength may last till reaching there, that I *may* see him.

"I will set the place in order—I may never do so again.

"Should anything happen to me—I would ask whoever may come to this poor place and may read this, my last desire, to treat the plants with tenderness—they are not valuable, but they know my hand; the dried ones are classed according to their species. All that is left is Arthur's. When older he will value the Book as my writing. I would ask, were it not for the trouble it will give, that when they throw these aching bones away, some of my plants may be placed near; they loved me of old, and I love them.

"I may be wrong to write thus, but after all it can be destroyed; it is well for the aged to be ready, and my life has welled out with my love; I set my heart on three in my time—my Girl, my Boy, and my Book, and they all have failed to respond! It is quite time.

"Now, Arthur, dear!—"

Through the afternoon and evening of the wet and windy day which followed, the old man made that toiling progress of love, and of devotion unto death. He reached the large house long after dusk had fallen. Cold gusts blew through the white hair, and tore the old coat asunder, and coursed up and down him, as though to tear the heart out for sport of a ghastly chase upon the wold.

He concealed himself in a tangled thicket, so chill the very birds had departed thence. Reedy creaking and tapping of the sedge, and coppice growth sere with the autumn dryness, made weird utterance as he crouched waiting for the dark. Then he crept forth.

Without one star to shed a ray of welcome, with the house rising black upon the pall-like sky, and trees a seeming retinue of shrouded sentinels, he crept with faltering, shaking steps.

"Good night, dear grandfather, good night!"—Page 363.

Every blind was drawn, the place was closed securely for the night, and his sinking heart turned colder, and colder, and colder.

He stole round to the side of the house. Ivy grew thick, and framed a small upper window, where a light shone behind curtains of dimity; and because it was the sole light anywhere, or perchance by some heaven-directed instinct, he kept his gaze, fast growing dim, upon that window. It seemed a long time, and by faintness he had fallen to the ground, when one within, retiring for the night, came between the curtains, and the light gleamed a halo about the golden head. He saw a little form clad all in white, draped by the snowy curtains, and he knew his prayer was heard—that his darling, like a child-angel, was there to gladden the dying gaze; and, listen! Perhaps it was his nightly custom. The boy had opened the lattice, and, turning to the direction of the little cottage beyond the downs, he called, "Good night, dear grandfather, good night!" then closed the window gently, and let the curtains drop.

A stifled moan, a great wistful yearning of the eyes, faint foam of blood upon the lips; then, like some faithful hound, he dragged himself close to the wall, to die beneath the window of his darling. He caught at a trail of the ivy and carried it to his lips, because that was near, and because the lad once loved it. And so—with the fond eyes turned upward to his room—he died; the ivy still upon the lips.

In a village graveyard, nestled between hills that overlooked his cottage, is a simple mound, without stone or any symbol save this—a trail of ivy at the head, about a group of herbs.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE RETURN OF ST. AUBYN.

LENGTHENED seemed the lonely vigil in the ancestral home; thrice the watchman without shook himself, replenished the lamp, and passed off to sleep again; it was the deathlike stillness and greyness that precede the dawn, and Lord Lindon stood in the great hall, below the shield bearing the emblazoned arms of his family; the scaffolding before it had been turned to account, a narrow ledge of planks having served for a platform, whereby men had been enabled to refurbish the discoloured surface.

"Alas!" he murmured, "can any restore the purity of our escutcheon?" And he passed onward to that romantic demesne, the garden. He witnessed the havoc neglect and decay had caused, with feelings of profoundest melancholy: his boyhood had there been joyous. Upon yon crumbling terrace a white-haired, benignant father had first led him to the throne of chivalry and honour, when he had promised his noble sire to be ever true to those instincts of their race; by that grim basin and dusky fountain he recalled a dignified lady of grave yet pleasant speech, and manners always gentle—his mother! She had sat beside it, telling him of his grandfather, and grandfathers beyond, and he recalled how he had sported with the dolphins in the sun for change, thinking one spray-dashed dolphin alive and all a-gleam was worth a dozen dead grandfathers mouldering in the vaults of Lindon. He thought of it now reproachfully. The satyrs stared upon him with blear-eyed vacancy, and the night-lizard, crouched upon the shoulder of a nymph, faced the intruder from below her carved locks of stone.

Flowers everywhere, wild and luxuriant, weeds growing rank and high, shrubs combining to prevent advance, and trees that interlaced above formed a miniature forest-awning. It was sad; it was beautiful. He quitted it with mingled feelings, love for the old place predominant; and, long before the coming workmen had crossed the Green, he had walked along Sleperton village, and the quaint High street of old Seaborough, that verily seemed unchanged in a name. He reached Seaborough station before even the large doors were unbolted by a drowsy porter, and waited in the dull, musty waiting-room the coming of a train. It was a time of dreariness. Upon the platform a lad swept the level boards with a broom fashioned in the shape of a rake, a man was cleaning the lamps, a woman was upon her knees scrubbing by the booking-place, a porter was sitting upon the weighing-machine, eating his breakfast from a saucer released from a handkerchief; flowers were trailing beyond the platform, where the master had a bit of garden-ground, and where some local artist had designed SEABOROUGH in oyster-shells, upon the bank of mould. A young girl came into the station; some comely country lass about the age of his girl at home; and he looked upon her kindly, asking if she had walked far that morning? "Yes, a goodish step, and would the train be long?" He could not tell her, knowing as little of it as did those grandfathers driven hither in their old-fashioned coaches. A young man, in black vestments of abbreviated pattern, entered noisily, and, unlocking with more noise the door of the ticket-office, passed behind, where he made more noise still, banging books, fighting stools, thrashing a stray cat of which Seaborough had been despoiled all night, counting his coin, clicking the telegraph machine, arranging that geographical puzzle—the ticket-cells, and was busy over much other preparatory work; midst of which his eminence the Station-master entered, with a chrysanthemum in his button-hole and a carbuncle on his nose; this affliction evidently made him constitutionally cross, for he abused the servants all round, and made a rush at the country lass as though he would eat her.

His lordship was glad to leave the place, dreading one or

other of the gossips dropping in might recognize him. It was a chill, comfortless journey to town, but he thought of home, and it made the distance shorter; why, he had not been away from Lena as long before, all the time they had been together!

Later, he knew again, as on the previous day, that singular sensation of revisiting the great metropolis after an interval of several years, one of the most peculiar experiences that can befall one.

By sunset he stood at foot of the cliff whereon his house was built. Here could just be seen a glimpse of the chimney-stack above the trees: and, quickly following the track of bramble-bordered pathway that wound upward to the plateau, he was speedily before the gate, and ringing its sonorous summons lustily, half hoping his idol would herself hasten to admit him. It was a soft and light footstep advancing over the stone court, yet in his eagerness it seemed very slow, and he rated himself for his impatience. The gate was unlocked and unbolted, and there stood Mrs. Brandon, dreadfully black and white, with a fine lawn handkerchief in hand, with which she just brushed her eyes, as though removing traces of tears she had heroically checked. And he, so quick to discern all little things, stood dismayed before so vivid an appearance of emotion; and he thought at first his Lena had been wilful, had been grieving this faithful guardian in his absence; but when he remarked a deeper gloom than such would warrant, and a stricken look, which he knew a woman might wear under weight of severest sorrow, he became alarmed in earnest, and hurriedly entreated to know the cause.

"Will you kindly let me close the gate, Mr. St. Aubyn, and then step to my sitting-room? And do not look so alarmed, sir; I admit it is serious, yes, serious, but nothing, I hope, you may not set right; but do, pray, be calm! If you get so excited I will not say a word!"

His deathly paleness made even her pause on the threshold of the blasting revelation.

"Tell me," he said, breathlessly, as soon as he had entered, and clutching her wrist: "Lena?"

"Is well!"

"Thank God!" sinking upon a chair; such wild and awful thoughts had flashed upon him. "Bring her to me!" he begged, faint and shaken.

The quiet woman stood beside him, and, with forbearance and deeply sympathetic utterance, entered upon the task.

"You are of a brave nature, Mr. St. Aubyn—brave natures are ever prepared for—for misfortune."

"What is the meaning of all this?" he cried in agony. "If you have anything to say, in mercy's name say it; do not fear for me! Ah, I can guess! That man, John Beech, has been here; he has seen my darling, he has been rude, has frightened her; I understand it all!"

"No, sir, your enemies are nearer home—"

"Heavens! What can the woman mean? Speak it out, madam. What is this thing, that you must so beat about the bush with it? Remember you have a man to deal with, to whom all this is child's play!" His teeth were close set, hands convulsively doubled: and, although so firm, she could see he trembled from head to foot, and she asked herself, "Whatever was in the chit to produce all this commotion?" Then softly, and manifestly with delicate reluctance, she resumed the work of breaking her ill-omened news,—

"I mean, Mr. St. Aubyn, we have cherished a viper in this house in that woman, Martha Saxe—"

"In Martha Saxe?"

"Ay, in Martha Saxe! The day you left, sir,—but there, I —can—not, so it's no use!" and, supremely affected, this good companion and guardian leaned back in her chair and wept a judicious little shower; not one tear too many or one too few, and all so quietly, as though deeply felt; no vulgar outburst of vociferous grief such as poor Saxe would have indulged in, but this tranquil outpouring of her pathetic sympathy; and spite of the confusion of imaginary terrors, St. Aubyn thought how true a friend was this who felt so deeply.

"Go on!" he said, gently and calmly, "do not fear for me. I can bear anything!"

"The day you left, sir, that woman left, went off without a word to any one; but this is not all; and you will please

prepare for that sorrowful remainder I would most willingly keep back—"

"Go on!" he spoke sternly, the words might have been iron-delivered.

"Miss Lena has also disappeared—I do not say with her, but both left this house within ten minutes of each other, as I ascertained; and if that base person has decoyed the dear young lady from her home, under pretence of complying with her oft-repeated wish to see the world, why, all I can say is, the woman ought to be handed over to justice and severely punished."

She had not raised her voice, made no unpleasant disturbance, but the grave solemnity indicated her abhorrence of a heinous crime; she might have been the Goddess of Justice herself, so calmly stern was that denunciation.

And he? Stood so utterly dumbfounded no word would come. Answer it! How could he answer it? Suspect its truth! Why that, even? His darling was stolen, or—had fled; and, remembering all that had transpired of late, the last seemed as probable; either were too horrible for thinking of, but they pressed him sore, were merciless, would have him confront all their dark and awful meaning, and brought with them a surrounding of horrors so poignant the man would have given his right hand to swoon from their recollection; but the presence was keen, vivid, piercing: it flayed and scathed and crushed him: and without any word he strode off to his study, the door of which he tremblingly locked. On all sides were reminders of the child; half-completed paintings brought in for him to see, then left unfinished; some dainty work in silk and wool contrived in colours of his choice; the couch and skins, her favourite seat, with the book she had just been reading; the sweet group of flowers her hand had gathered and placed in the vase beside his desk: and in the extremity of his pain he looked, half-nervously, round the room for any sign, a line or two in the pretty handwriting, some explanation, the least token of farewell, but there was nothing!

At any time the effect of this blow would have been prostrating, but following upon the ordeal of returning to the

old home it found him already tried and weak, less able than ever to undergo this second faithless desertion.

"I must be a man!" The hollow desolate utterance gave the lie to that resolute yet despairing tone. "I must bestir myself, there is not a moment to be lost, they may be traced, I may yet rescue her, I will not sit down under the crushing blow while my darling, so helpless, so innocent, is adrift upon the world! If she wished to leave me and—Oh! this cannot be; it would be her ignorance and longing for novelty, natural under the circumstances; I will try not to think ill of her, I dread it! I am much to blame; I should not have isolated her so completely from the society of others, and the scenes she longed to see; perhaps I have been selfish, foolish, mistaken; yes! I would think it more my fault than hers, my darling's; who surely loved me too well ever to forsake me!"

Calmer, incidental attendant aspects flashed upon him, and he looked at it and tried to think it was nothing but a girl's high-spirited freak: and he knew that when a girl does do a foolhardy thing it is ten times more monstrous and unaccountable than a boy's. Lena had taken this step recklessly, impulsively, without weighing any consequences, or bestowing any thought, and certainly without calculating treachery to himself or to her love for him; thus he sought to gain comfort. The brunt of the shock was past, and, like many tremendous shocks, it galvanized him to artificial strength and instant action. And so when there came a gentle, ever so gentle and considerate, tap at the door, and the woman of the panther step entered with a little arrowroot, biscuits, a tiny liqueur glass, and fanciful atoms of toast, all upon a snowy tray-cloth arranged with the nicety of a wife or a mother: she was confronted, to her surprise and chagrin, by that figure at its utmost dignity, and a smile full of both confidence and hope.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE OLD MUSICIAN.

An elderly man; rather plain of feature; meagre, gaunt, and cadaverous: not prepossessing, but he played the violin—divinely.

Member of the orchestra in a popular theatre, Strandwards.

A dweller with others in the plainest house of a plain terrace, the landlady whereof was plain, and a gossip to boot.

One evening the woman pricked her finger and gossiped on, slight matter; next day the finger commenced gathering, and pain set in; the woman groaned, gossiping still; the day following, a slovenly maid was sent for Dr. Nichols, who had an extensive practice in that suburb. He lanced, she winced, tongue running nineteen to the dozen on her lodgers and their antecedents this hundred years, amongst others, him she styled "the Fiddle-man."

He had one room, half-way to the top; had occupied that room eleven years without leaving anything upon the mantelpiece, but two evenings ago had, by accident, left an envelope thereon; and, also by accident, she had looked therein, to see—to her shocked surprise—the short-skirted figure of a child-dancer, pet of some low ballet troupe; pretty, she was forced to admit, but the idea! She soon settled that small outrage by throwing it in the fire; such things lying about her house, indeed!

Groaning came on here, and she said no more; the doctor thought no more, returned his case to his pocket and departed.

About three weeks afterwards, as Dr. Nichols was sitting

down to dinner, he was called to No. 7, Croft's Place, to which semi-select locality he hastened at once. An uncomely specimen of womanhood ushered him upstairs, muttering something about a gentleman's daughter from the theatre; the poor girl was feverish, she thought. He passed into an untidy, smoke-dried room, and the scene presented may be thus described: a small bed, where, beneath a patchwork coverlet, a child was restlessly turning a flushed, beautiful face from the fire, before which was kneeling a gaunt man, endeavouring to toast a piece of bread; a picture or two on the walls; a shell-box on the mantel, and two vases with artificial flowers; a small table whereon was a work-box, a music score, a play-bill, a dish of preserve and some confectionery; a threadbare carpet, a rug worked with fierce peacocks, a hassock patched with shreds of an old dog-skin jacket, two tumbled muslin skirts, with tinsel ornaments, a faded paper wreath, a Watteau hat of common material but bewitching style; and, placed in one corner, a violin-case.

The woman went out, pushing the door roughly; the man continued his toasting, but apologized. He was about to make some toast-and-water; his little girl was tormented by thirst. There was something almost as feverish about the man as the child; he was terribly anxious, as was betrayed by every movement, by the agonized eagerness with which he watched the doctor's face while feeling the little sufferer's pulse, by his gasping, breathless,—

"Well, doctor?"

His suspense was quieted upon the assurance that the fever was within check. A nasty low disorder, the outcome of late hours and gas, all weathers and undue exercise, poor living and excess of excitement, and a generally over-wrought system. The child's beauty was very marked, and, seen with that hectic splendour, created an admiring interest altogether apart from professional sympathy. Brown curls tossed hotly back upon the pillow, and eyes flashing with a dangerous light, arms outstretched as seeking for some cool, refreshing shadow; parched lips consumed and curved longingly for fruit, or fragrant kisses of cold snowdrops, or violets yet sprinkled

with the dew. The man, with infinite patience, held his bread before the miserable fire, looking from it to the child with rapid glances of love and care.

"You have nothing to fear, I will send my lad with some mixture, which please administer according to directions; take care of the window, it's rather draughty, keep her well covered, don't leave her—"

A moan here from the man, betraying great feeling.

"Alas, sir, I am compelled to attend my duties at the theatre—"

"Oh, of course—nobody to stay with her."

"I always lock the door—I could not leave it open in a house like this; we are poor" (with diffidence), "one day we may be more comfortably situated" (staring upon the toast as though it represented a chart of life).

"I will send our maid to sit with your little one during the evening, if it can be managed, until your return from the performance."

This being proposed out of simple kindliness, the doctor was altogether unprepared for the ebullition of gratitude that followed. Wheeling round, still upon his knees, the man cordially expressed his thanks, and in such a trembling voice it seemed no common love, this of the old musician for his child.

The doctor's lady, however, took exception to the project; it was unusual and dangerous, for the people were evidently of inferior degree; professional visiting was one thing, but if every medical man was supposed to send his domestics to sit with the patients, what on earth would become of the kitchens? He did not press the point, he never did, experience warned him that the more points are sharpened, the weaker become arguments. The girl was quite in her mistress's confidence, and, even had he insisted, would have been anything but an agreeable companion for the little patient, in whom he felt so keen an interest. He despatched his page to the old nurse it was their custom to employ, for certain valuable qualities not general with the order; but the woman was away, and he began to be apprehensive his intentions would be frustrated. Then a consultation ensued in the surgery, between the good doctor

and his page, in whom he placed wonderful confidence: the boy having something more than a pretty face and engaging manners to recommend him,—a tact and tenderness as valuable as they were becoming. The doctor had the boy from his brother-in-law, Joseph Blake, in whose country house he had won golden opinions: and the doctor's sister, Mrs. Joseph Blake, expressed herself sorry beyond measure to part with him; but a sad occurrence had happened which seemed to prey upon the boy's spirits; he was evidently dull and unhappy; and Joseph, who felt some little remorse, although in his blunt good-nature his designs had been of the best, contrived this change of scene: and the boy, who was as sensitive as he was sensible, appreciating this, and liking his new home, although not his new life, appeared the happier for the change.

"Perhaps Mrs. Jenkins would oblige me for an hour or two?"

This was in allusion to the kind-hearted wife of the grocer at the corner, whom the doctor had been the humble instrument of restoring to health, and who, like most of his patients, was very poor; indeed life was so much a struggle with the pair, he had never sent in his bill, awaiting better times for the worthy tradesman. It occurred to him this person would be able to watch during the worst of the hours, those of absence of the kind guardian. He had detected at once that the man was no relative; but, after long London experience in poor quarters, and amongst the kindly souls who toil and struggle, one loses surprise at coming upon odd protection of the young: and we take it as indisputable that any protection is better than none in the grim City. The doctor's heart was very large, and full of pity for those having no helper, and who were engaged in work of a dangerous character. Such he considered the occupation of the child-dancers of the theatres, exposed to temptation of all sorts, to which the exercise in the unnatural heat renders them peculiarly susceptible; contaminating and unhealthy influences besetting them from all quarters. His residence was situated near to a large theatre, and close by a colony of those whose little ones helped to make the spectacle poetic and graceful; it had thus been his

lot to come much in the way of these, and to observe the evil effects arising from the forced life.

His boy returned promptly. There was no need to ask the result; the features were so mobile, utterance was interpreted before ever the lips were opened. The man was away; there was no one else to mind the shop, or she would have come to him at once; and in this quarter it was customary for the shops to be kept open until past eleven o'clock.

By this time the man had, no doubt, left the sick child, to attend to his duties, and the doctor could realize the anxiety of his mind while accompanying the gay and grotesque show upon his instrument. The medicine must be sent, for it was most imperative that it should be administered at once. He knew it was impossible to depend upon that coarse and slovenly woman at the house, or any of her kin, who moreover were best out of the chamber. He was placed by his own humanity in a dilemma of feeling, which a cooler practitioner would have adjusted by permitting matters to take their course. This he could not do, although how to remedy affairs in so serious an emergency he was unable to solve. Then came his gentle boy to the relief, blue eyes all lighted up with the tender solicitude witnessed beside his dead grandfather; when he had patiently sat out the night-hours unwearily watching where none heard his sobbing prayers. Could he be of service here? He had to go with the medicine. Might he administer the proper portion, hand fruit or drink, and stay until the return of the musician? Having weighed this well, it seemed to the doctor an opportune proposal, and one way at least out of the difficulty. With the medicine and fruit and certain little delicacies, his boy set forth; gas-light from the shop-windows gilding his curls, a ruby glow from the doctor's surgery-lamp flooding his fair young face, while turning to bid a respectful adieu.

An hour later, having occasion to go very near the house, the doctor called to see how the little sufferer was progressing. To his remark that he would go up to the room, the woman gave a surly nod, and flounced to some lower region, from whence came sounds of lamentation and woe.

The door was slightly ajar; he entered noiselessly, and found his page bending over the child, wiping the moisture from her brow with infinite tenderness. He never forgot her beaming glance at the beautiful face leaning over her with brotherly sympathy. The picture was so pretty he did not speak, but waited in the doorway. Smoothing the sheet and tucking the coverings close, the boy turned to resume his seat beside the bed: when, catching sight of the doctor, he quietly and without embarrassment gave place, remarking in low tones,—

"The carriages and noise outside seem to disturb her, sir."

"Has she been delirious at all?"

"Only restless; sometimes talking of the theatre, fearful of a mistake in the figure."

"I can wait five or ten minutes, if you would like a walk during that time."

When the boy had gone, the doctor had leisure to observe the child, and for once was full of regret that the art of the painter had never been his. The hectic transparency lent charm to the features, in themselves of an exquisite moulding; and, whatever the opinion of the old violin-player, the doctor certainly experienced profound regret that so fair a creature should be thus prostrated, the young life consuming itself. She awoke from a short interval of painful slumber, opened her large eyes wide upon him, and spoke as one struggling from out of a dream.

Where is shed a holier life than in the awakening from some dream in childhood? What lovelier than those rose-hued, chaste transitions, when the soul is winged and comes back to consciousness with half-reluctant, half-eager fluttering?

"Where is he?" asked the child timidly, looking round the room.

"It is not yet time for his return, my dear; it is but ten o'clock; the performance is not over for an hour yet."

"Where is he?" she repeated, looking troubled and eager; then, as though to herself, "One doesn't feel kisses in dreams —not real kisses!"

"You mistake, my child; I am the doctor. My little page has been watching beside you in case your illness should take a turn; he was only wiping your forehead; his gentleness led you to believe it a fairy's kiss."

She leaned upon her elbow, and, looking at the doctor with grave decision, said,—

"I tell you he kissed me—I know what kisses are—and he knelt by this bed and prayed I might soon be better."

Here was a revelation, of original sin or original goodness, —which?

"Well, now tell me what is the matter here?" taking seat beside the bed, and feeling the quick, irregular pulse.

"I think I caught cold coming home from the theatre."

"Very likely. What do you do there?"

"I dance in the fairy scene."

"Just so—muslin skirts up to the knees—little or nothing under the skirts—draughts from all quarters; then you blame it on God's good weather! Very wrong of you, little fairy!"

She smiled faintly at his petulance, and replied, in similar spirit,—

"There's winds as well as draughts, and we haven't too much to wear, outside."

"And—your father?"

"Always waits for me and sees me home here, and often wraps me in his own great-coat. I owe everything to him, except my engagement at the theatre."

Of the many idyls the doctor had met with in common life, none had so aroused his interest as this of the old violin-player; he hoped to hear more of the story; he had been a close student of psychological phenomena, and this was not the kind upon which he had bestowed least attention.

Around the room were evidences of much quiet thought on the part of the home-maker. Grapes on a chair by the bed-side, violets in a little vase, a book of pictures, and covers of old music gorgeous with drabbled hues; a framed piece of colour hung where it would meet the invalid's gaze; apparel neatly folded and arranged with reverent care; charred remains

of a play-bill, as though the burner hated the sight of them; a man's walking-stick, and with it a small gingham umbrella. He took all in with a medical man's quick perception, and the result presented itself as a kind and watchful good genius at work in this small abode.

"Now, little girl, pay great attention to what I am going to say. To get well, you will take the medicine I shall send, and keep as quiet as you can, certainly not tossing about in that restless fashion; to keep well, you will have to give up the theatre!"

Her face clouded over in an instant; the life was exercising its fatal fascination.

"He says so!" murmured the girl, as though impressed by the coincidence; and then pleadingly to the adviser: "I should be sorry to do that; in time I shall be in the front row, and have fifteen, instead of seven, shillings a-week!"

"Well, we will not talk about that now, but I'm sorry to see you so fond of it. How long have you been doing this?"

"Ever since poor mother died, two years ago; a kind woman where we lived (the landlady), took me one day to the manager, and he had me taught; I heard him say my face wasn't much, but my hair, if attended to, would be magnificent, and that and my legs would be his fortune!" (with *naïveté* impossible to render here).

"Very pretty, indeed! And I suppose it never occurred to you to object to this appraisement?"

"I don't know what that is, but I slapped the call-boy's face because he was rude to me; I've only to complain to father if any one insults me, and *he* soon settles it."

"Why do you say 'father?'"

"It's more convenient and saves talking, besides being the most proper name. If you only knew his goodness, sir!" Eyes filling with tears at the recollection of the long service of love.

"I do know it, my child. How came it first about?"

"From seeing me every night, and knowing I was quite alone in the world, I suppose. In the whirl and passing of the dance I always found his eyes upon me, watching me as

my mother used to watch, when I went an errand down the street; and I grew to love those eyes, and to smile at him and no one else, at every coming round. Then he waited for me at the stage door, and used to take me out, and to church on Sundays; and so we became fast friends, and will remain so all our lives!"

"I hope so!" the doctor replied devoutly; "but not if you ask for the fancied kissers of your dreams."

Whereat she blushed, waxed angry, and turned her back upon him.

"Ah, well, my child, do not mind me; I am old and cross-grained, yet would be your friend." The doctor looked at his watch, saying kindly, "It is time for me to go, I may be sent for at my house; you will be all right until your father's coming, and as your nurse has returned I will leave you in his care."

Arthur behaved with discretion, taking a book and seating himself by the fire. This child seemed so different to Rose Blake, scarcely of a like order of humanity; the beauty here was wild, and of an untamed type; its physical aspect, perhaps, presenting a more striking picture, with the deep brown of hair and eyes; the dark complexion, fever-hued with mocking health, vivacity, and *esprit*, even in sickness lending singular charm to this waif of Bohemia. Yet even as his memory of the chemist's child was that one exquisite jewel of life, the first dream, he did not so much as turn towards this other until she called him. Afterwards he recounted to his friend, the sympathetic Dr. Nichols, all that transpired, and a very ingenuous and original narration it was.

"I turned some time afterwards, sir, thinking the little girl asleep, not having spoken: but she was looking at me, wide awake, so I went on with my reading. Presently she said, 'The doctor told you to watch by me!' 'So I am, miss!' I answered. 'I call that watching by the fire! Why don't you come and tell me a story?' I did so, about a book I had from the Sunday School last week. 'Do you like Sunday Schools?' I asked of her. 'Don't know what they are!' she answered; 'I think I should like the theatres best.' Then I said, 'I'm sorry for your taste, miss!' 'I wish you wouldn't keep

Miss-ing me so much,' she cried angrily; 'save that for your little friends on Sunday, sir!' and she turned her back upon me. I continued reading, wishing her father would come; but she looks so pretty when cross—so pretty—I could not help looking up now and then; and once she caught me, but then she must have been looking on the sly.' 'I say,' she said, 'does your Sunday School teach you to kiss folks that cannot defend themselves?' at which I looked down, for I have always so wished I had a little sister, and I had dared to think for a moment how happy I should be with such an one. I answered, 'I meant no harm; I ask your pardon, it was no wrong kiss!' 'Well, since you explain so prettily you may have another—kiss me, nurse!' She looked so demure in ordering me, and I was so glad to be good friends, that I did so. And then we had some fruit each, talking about when she was well, what pleasant walks we'd have, if you were willing. I said, 'Perhaps your father won't like it, Amy'—she wished me to call her Amy—'because in that case we would do nothing of the sort!' 'You're a very good boy,' she said; 'but let me tell you he is a dear, kind, loving one, and won't mind a bit!' I told her you had said she wasn't to talk, but to keep quiet; and there she was running on and as fidgety as ever she could be! She said, 'Well, how should you like to be lying here, when you ought to be with the *coryphées?* I answered, 'But then I should never want 'to be with the *coryphées!*'' 'Ah, you may talk, but you haven't seen me in the lime-light, in new *tulle*, and with a diamond star in my hair, at the parting!' 'I dare say you look very pretty, Amy; the plainest of girls is improved under those circumstances!' 'That's a horrid throw at me.' 'No, it is not meant in that way; but you must and shall keep quiet, or I will go; why, you are much more flushed than you were! Do, to please me and all of us!' She was quiet after that, and before long had gone to sleep. The little piece of candle —you remember the small piece it was, sir?—burnt down and out; I could not find another, there was no bell. I listened for the landlady's coming, and asked for her, and was told she had gone out for the evening. The woman I spoke to, who

has the rooms above, said she burnt lamps, or would lend me an end: and then went in and closed her door loudly; there was nothing to do but wait till her father returned. I drew up the blind; the moonlight fell across the centre of the room; one of her hot hands strayed over the quilt: I took it and placed it underneath; the movement, careful as it was, awoke her, or appeared to do so; but she had changed and seemed all excitement. Catching sight of the moonlight on the boards and on the white skirts, she started with a cry, threw her arms up, jumped from the bed, and dashed into the maddest dance I ever saw; there where the moonlight—"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the doctor, interrupting the young narrator very anxiously; "a pretty thing came of leaving you in charge! Why, the child was delirious again—must have been!"

"I implored of her to go quietly back to bed; she only replied by a peal of laughter, and at that moment her father stood in the doorway. I could not see his face, but the cry he gave was more horrible than any we heard in the hospital, that day when we had to go to see the poor man who was taken there!"

"And what did he do; whatever could he think?"

"Well, sir, he seemed more put out at my being there than he would have been at finding her alone, he was rather gruff, did not thank me, and bade me not to come again!"

"I can understand it; that I will set right in the morning; but the girl, how is she now? What turn did the frenzy take?"

"Faintness, with shivering, and asking for water; he put her back, and after a little while she was calm—not asleep, but as still!"

"All is well, the passion spent itself; she will be better after this."

In the morning the doctor was at the house rather earlier than it was his custom to call upon patients. Croft's Place was not improved by daylight: and No. 7 was, if anything, the most objectionable in the rank of houses.

In all London terraces below a certain grade, there is great

uniformity in the matter of dinginess, dirtiness, untidiness, and smokiness. Why the features should be peculiar to London, and characteristic of these grim rows of dwellings, is a problem the most enlightened citizen would have to commune with his wife upon.

The pretty patient was considerably better, yet with traces of the struggle painfully visible. Dr. Nichols shook hands with her guardian, who had been the devoted watcher through the night: he looked haggard and worn.

"Why, friend, you must not lose your rest like this, or I shall have *you* upon my list; uneasy as you have been, there is no need for fear; you have passed the night in terror?"

"I have passed the night in prayer."

"And your prayer has been mercifully answered; your child is better!"

"Not mercifully; I prayed my child might die!"

"*Die!* Why, man, what shocking wickedness is this?"

He stood with dignity that surprised the other: and, with calmness, said,—

"I owe you an explanation!"

He motioned to a chair; the doctor sat down; he continued standing with a hand upon its back, but in such a way that his eyes were never lifted from that loving vigil.

"You know I am employed in the orchestra of the theatre close by, of which I have been a member for some years, and I have worked diligently and regularly in my profession? Perhaps you know little of our lives; although night after night facing a whirl of excitement there is dreadful monotony; and the same thing year after year, and every night of the year, with exception of the blessed Sabbaths, is very wearying. The only change is afforded by that of the stage itself. A new play is welcomed by no one so heartily as by the musicians, who usher it in and link its shifting pictures. Privately, apart from this, my life has been a sad and lonely one; I have known much trouble, disappointment, difficulty, and sickness; I have been very isolated, with no one to love me, and nothing to love; of course in an insignificant being like the

violin-player of a theatre, that is a matter of little moment—I only mention it.

"Well, sir, stationed as we are, in such close view of the actors upon the stage, one is sure to take a liking for one or other of those so frequently brought to the fore: yet have I seen a procession of fair faces without experiencing interest in any—I speak of the younger men. I think I used to watch the children with most pleasure, yet with pain, for I sorrowed to see their fresh young beauty grow paler night by night, and the lissom limbs lose measure in the progress of the dance. From when this little face shone forth upon the old boards, a new interest in the place seemed aroused within me; it was like a fairer flower, and I loved it—I loved it!"

His worn sad face had softened to inexpressible fondness, the eyes never lifted from the flushed beauty upon the pillow.

"I was told some woman, not the mother of this child, had brought her to the theatre, and offered her on sale, or loan, or hire, if they could make anything out of her. From one to another the child was tossed, a general favourite and public property; the manager used to recompense first one and then another of the women to see to her. I would watch for her as eagerly as though my own, the little face became to me the star of that strange world; I never played so well as when the sweet child shone to my music. While her swift feet worked the tracery of its measures, her eyes would flash to the sound in rhythm, more perfect than any accompaniment of voice; and when the child was off the stage the lights seemed dull and all the place was dim. I had no interest beyond the notes, save for wondering what she was doing and in what company she might be cast. It is a morbid instrument, the violin, sir: one falls a-thinking over its tune! I was always thinking of the poor young thing, with never a father's or a mother's care and love to keep it good, and pure, and innocent. Thus month after month went on, and I marked the expanding of her beauty and growth of her fragile frame, even in that artificial and forcing life. At last a great comfort fell upon me, I attracted her attention, her interest, her affection: she could

not but mark the constant scrutiny always in that one spot! She did! She did!" At this, with a passionate outburst, he clasped his hands, and stooping, kissed her fondly.

"From that moment we were friends, good friends: she confided all her little cares and sorrows, asked advice, and sought assistance, at *my* hands. I gave her all; and, that she might be better provided for, set aside the half of my salary for her especial use. She grew straight, and strong, and beautiful, and I knew my first great grief when rude eyes of stranger patrons were caught by the symmetry too faultlessly perfect to pass in the crowd. I grew restless and uneasy, and racked by a mighty pain. Her mixing with those of the profession was sufficient cause, but when it came to molestation from the public—or that part of it existing to wreck and ruin—I was ever at her elbow to protect her from insult and temptation. I have won a victory—in taking her from old companions; I may yet complete it. Oh, that I could take her from the stage! But she is so wedded to it by association and liking, she pines and is miserable if removed but for a night. Believe me I *have* tried, by all the means human ingenuity could devise, to raise her from that. But I notice the love of the hollow horrible life increasing and growing with her growth; the pleasure and excitement, the vanity and ambition, combine to enchain her whole heart and soul, and if persevered in they will result in her destruction. Then do you wonder at my prayer, unloving and impious though it seem? Ah, if you knew the depth of this love for my darling, you would cease to wonder! Better, far better, for the good Lord to save her while there is time: my influence may not suffice, I scarcely think it; and I am not strong, and a-weary, so weary!"

The tone died away to a plaint that was so very pathetic, it moved the doctor, and, taking his trembling hand, he attempted a little common-sense argument.

"My good friend, you are letting your morbidness, your sensitive apprehensiveness, run away with your reason. Although I disapprove of the theatre on the score of health, and perhaps on moral grounds, I believe it to be as possible for a child to be uncontaminated in its atmosphere as in that of most other

forms of apprenticeship; still it is uncertain, and once the seed has sunk, it is no longer on the surface to be traced, unfortunately for some of us. You cannot have been and cannot be with your child every minute of her time, and it seems to me, in going to sea in a doubtful craft, one must, at least, prepare for a wreck, and rather blame oneself than Providence. Do not think me hard, I am but representing the matter practically. Were you a man of fortune, with nothing to do but hedge in your *protégée* from others and the world, the case would be different; but even then you could not root out the past, supposing a past. I confess I have not much faith in human nature of whatever age; but at this, I imagine, it is rather worse than any other. I am sorry to say my theories are not to the credit of my kind. If you who are older, and *have* known wounds, can entertain faith, and experience confidence, so much the better, although it appears to me very like crawling down the jagged wall of an earthquake. Depend upon this, the happiest people in the world are those who feel nothing, who lay themselves open to no sensibility, shut eyes and ears to everything, especially everything emotional; and who go on their way disturbing about nothing and disturbed by nobody, either to love or to hate. These are the people who live so long, and who crow over the graves of such as you and I. My candour pains you, and I am sorry, but I have spoken in honest sympathy; my thanks for your confidence, it shall not be misplaced: any time I can be of service, command me."

He grasped the kind hand at this, and exclaimed,—

"You can; and now! Receive her into your house to wait upon your lady; train her to be good, and useful, and pure—you can do it all better than I, and she would still be mine, *mine*, to be taken some day when I have put by sufficient, but it would be better now to see her in some quiet home circle."

"With great pleasure, my friend; I trust, nay, I am sure, when I put it properly to her, my wife will not object; but yourself—what will you do without your little favourite?"

He looked upward with a sublime and trustful expression.

"It is for her good. For my love I will bear to part with her; besides (eagerly), you will permit her to come and see me. Ah, my darling! (leaning over the child) you will be safe there, safe."

Broken, uncertain utterance from the restless sleeper, and they heard this,—

"Kiss me—once more—call that last a kiss? Why they burn me through after the dancing: quick, the doctor will be here, but we will be alone again in moonlight, and love when he has gone. How pretty you are, and not rude to me like those at the play! *You* are the prince I've danced with all this time. I've fancied your beauty—seen it every night; all the dance long it has led me like a splendour till I've lost myself, and—you—are here!"

The old man was ghastly. Lower and lower the head had sunk, the gaunt form being all drawn up and bent.

This man, with his simple idyl and mad hope, moved the doctor to infinite pity. He pressed his hand with sympathy of no common order, and walked to the window. He felt in some measure responsible for this piece of pain. Although done with the best of motives, the best of motives—as is usual—proved the worst of friends, and by the new light he saw another mistake. If man would but be guided by his wife, who counsels often, not wisely, but too well!

He looked forth—people in emergency have no alternative but to look forth. His inspection of nature without was not reassuring; it was the usual dismal yet varied London back-view vista of chimneys, panorama of tiles, grim lengths of parapet and serried ranks of sloping slate, dizzy corners, and stone edgings overhanging the streets. To the right, a large advertising station, all aflame with a huge painting of the fairy scene from a theatre-spectacle near by, where little ones were pursued by evil, and rescued by good genii, with all the other pageant of the poetic allegory. At an angle, the windowed-wall and crowded lamps of a gin palace; at the rear, the glass roof of a photographer's; a deserted chicken walk; some boxes of leafless shrub; a rope dangling from house to house, upon which an array of linen fluttering to the public edification; two cats

at drawn battle over a fallen sparrow, and a woman dancing a baby at an upper window. Turning round, he found the man, deadly pale, standing with hands clasped behind him, looking down upon the little burning face.

The doctor was shocked at the stony calmness, and laid his hand upon the man's shoulder.

"Come," he said, "you feel things too much—you suffer this to trouble you more than there is occasion for."

He was saying "Good-bye," when, speaking very softly, he added,—

"We neither of us foresaw this—you will change your decision, and remain, as you most properly are, the child's best friend."

He was staring vacantly over at the brown old instrument, and with one stride he was up beside it, clutching with convulsive fondness, as though returning to *the unchanged*. He tapped it half fondly, as to say, "This, this is my all!" Then he turned feverishly to the doctor.

"You will forgive me if I play: this has borne my suffering before?"

Without awaiting permission he dashed off upon a strain of unearthly utterance; wild, and weird, more a fantastic, horrible wailing than any melody; now soaring to an illimitable comprehension of anguish, now plunging as in throes of dire extremity, now sinking to quivering solos of keen tenderness and anguish. The doctor gazed upon the man as upon one demented.

It was not agreeable, nor clever, and blindly passionate; it was agony bursting from the bow. The doctor looked the old musician calmly in the face,—

"If—you—play—thus—you—will—break—a—string!"

The measured words checked the outburst, the playing changed to the very opposite—a harum-scarum dance piece and medley of vicious airs; this he interchanged by variations upon a string that was more eloquent than any cry of any human heart; the frenzy of merriment rose and sharpened until it became a shrill shriek of hysterical hilarity; keener, more acutely vivid; and the doctor covered his ears. The

man took no notice, he was beside himself; all the endurance of months, and untold suffering—all the fears and terrors and blind passionate yearning—all the love and grim waste of uncared-for life came out as a libretto to that fantasia of mad excitement; and through it all, the airs he rendered every night, from repetition the part and parcel of his spirit, a horrible travesty upon his pain, a satanic dual-anguish with the opera of his madness. And more biting, cutting, stinging, clove from the strings that dread strain: more screaming, mirthful, and exquisitely tempestuous, a very hurricane of glee, with notes of awful torture heard in the storm. Wild yells crept forth and were scoured about by the jovial crew of wondering long-drawn echoes, pealed forth with discordant clangour, or quivered with solemn and mournful distress through the thrilled air. It was a great and horrible performance of sound—music of a ghastly kind. As it intensified, the child moved uneasily, and struggled as though under the influence of some mighty power, and opening wide her sparkling eyes, seeming to distend at every nerve and drink in the melody to the utmost quiver of its fierce contention; starting up in bed, on the bed, off the bed, on to the floor, and there in the one gleam of sunshine breaking into the maddest dance eyes ever witnessed. The experience of the doctor's gentle page had in part prepared him for some such exhibition as this, a fit accompaniment to that frenzy from the violin. Never would he forget that frantic tarantula, a new phase in his medical experience. Professional brethren to whom he afterwards spoke of it in confidential conference assured him that, although rare, such ebullitions are by no means impossible, with certain acutely constituted natures; he was compelled to admit, however, this instance stood alone in his personal experience. The excitement aroused or let loose by the strain had seized upon the child, and she danced with delirious glee, with such rapidity the doctor became alarmed, the player caught the infection; he noticed it and was glad. At that moment, with the final effort of his expiring strength, a string broke, the sound ceased, the violin falling upon the ground; and the child sinking into the doctor's arms out-stretched to save her, for his knowledge of

hysterical fits warned him of the reaction to ensue—the faintness and exhaustion inevitable. The man himself sat panting like some beast after a hard chase, with the note of the hunter yet upon the wind. The doctor placed a damp towel upon the white little brow, perfectly white now, he was rejoiced to see. He held her firm, that is, made the firmness felt, for although the excitement had subsided there were struggling, panting throes as of some evil spirit subdued and bound, shaking the slight lithe form revengefully. A shattered, smitten little girl, fainting and flushed, throbbing, and with lilies rising above the burnt scarlet: a mere bird subjected to the torture, and bird-like nestling on his bosom, lying back wearied and pale and in pain, looking up languidly in his face as imploring him to heal—him, poor comer-in between souls and mender of bruised bodies, as though he could readjust these finer ailments or minister to a mind diseased. But he just whispered while placing her in the little bed,—

"It is in your power to make him well and happy, and yours alone."

He dared not say more then, but he thought she understood.

And most touching of all the incidents of this memorable time was the meek coming of the old man to her bedside, all trembling with love and tenderness, leaning over her with infinitude of devotedness, breathlessly waiting, eyes all lighted up with hope for a look, a word of recognition.

But she put him from her as with aversion.

His bowed sorrow and wounded love spoke in the dignity with which he moved back. He returned to his seat, resigned, sad, and now composed. It was the dangerous apathy of dead sorrow, the torpor of despair.

"It is nothing," said the doctor aside; "will pass off, symptom of no account."

He looked gratefully from the shadow as he stooped to take up the violin; he was locking it away in the case when Dr. Nichols arose once more to depart. Holding his hand out with farewell cordial sympathy, he said,—

"I can be of no further use here. She will be safe in your charge; her recovery, please God, commences with this—

keep her quiet and leave nature to itself. I will look in to-morrow."

He muttered his broken thanks, carrying the friend's hand to his lips. Dr. Nichols hastened from the room, and walking briskly home thought on poor Beethoven's words, "My misfortune gives me double pain since through it I am misunderstood. For me the recreation of human society, conversation, the interchange of affection, have no place. I must live an exile. Farewell, and do not quite forget me in death; I have deserved it of you, for I have often thought of you in life, and studied how to make you happy: may you be so."

How many of us understand these æolian natures, these souls all attune to excess of feeling? After what eccentric standard would the world rate the scene he had witnessed but now? One of those more subtile episodes off the beaten groove we come upon sometimes, and no more understand than the ancient rites and mysticisms of long dead peoples and long buried faiths. We can only go on our way wagging the head, perhaps bestowing vulgar commiseration, knowing as little of the laws which regulate the poetry and music of the soul in its sorrow as of that majestic scheme of creation secret to the Infinite.

The doctor entered his house in a very thoughtful mood.

Sitting by the fire with a favourite volume, he yet could not read that night, looking in the vivid coals where weird faces seemed to glow, and the wondrous blending of youth and age to be illuminated with more significance of meaning than ever. His good wife remarked upon the abstraction of his manner, and asked him,—

"What of your little patient, my dear?"

The boy was handing coffee, a rich glow dyed his cheek, and the hand holding the cream-ewer was shaken nervously. He was going to leave the room hurriedly before the doctor could reply properly to the question. This was contrary to the latter's plans; he bade him stay and place some papers in order, that were scattered upon his desk; then detailed so much as he considered prudent and most likely to advance the cause at heart.

His wife shrugged her shoulders, seemed to reflect, and said sententiously,—

"You have done well, my dear! (This was better than he had expected; he received reward where it was most sweet, in his wife's approval.) Yes, you have done well: she shall come to us as soon as sufficiently recovered; under my care she may be made an amiable and worthy child; intelligent she already is, I am satisfied."

Of course he had not by word or hint connected Arthur in any way; he knew of his own good sense the boy would understand and be wise.

He would not damp his wife's kind sympathy, but in his heart was convinced that once recovered, so far from being content to settle in their quiet home, the girl would be back at her old wearying life of excitement and glitter. As if it was morally feasible, that a girl accustomed for two years or more to dancing at a theatre night after night, would settle down to quiet darning, or reading old volumes of Christian magazines!

The outburst he had witnessed (he had not thought it necessary to disclose either the record of one or other of the sad displays) betrayed the strong hold the life had upon her, and he would have staked his professional honour upon the utter impossibility of its eradication.

That her guardian could use restraint he did not for a moment believe. Such policy would change whatever love she entertained to hate. The only course would be to watch over her delicately from the distance—no slight charge where the foot-lights intervene.

He visited his interesting patient daily, then at more extended periods as she improved sufficiently to take short walks, leaning upon her guardian's arm. She progressed rapidly, and it was long before autumn flowers had ceased to bloom that he congratulated her upon return to health.

As he suspected, the aversion to her kind protector was but temporary; her affection increased with recovery.

One day when the doctor called, he wished to test the old passion; a new *ballet* had recently been produced at her theatre,

a spectacle of magnificence. He casually alluded to it, when he detected a slight shudder, a paler hue, and she hastily replied that she had given up thinking of the theatre!

What marvellous light shone on the musician's face: he looked across at his friend, as showing himself satisfied for once and for ever!

The passion then had spent itself, in that hour of her mad tarantula!

And thus far a good result had come of that wild strain. By his own art, in his own agony, he had conquered.

* * * * * *

Mrs. Blake brought Rose and came up to town for a week, to stay with her brother and his wife, and to see the shops, the autumn novelties, and possible winter fashions.

Arthur knew they were coming, and he was a little sad; for they came from the glorious hills, the quiet lanes, the sweet downland villages, the old woods of Sussex: they came from still water-courses, from silent ways where those herbs grew, which the dear dead hand had gathered. He quivered at the very name of their town; he trembled at apprehension of some remark, careless enough, yet that would pain; and he remembered his grandfather's dread of this child, Rose, he was longing yet fearing to see.

Arthur was at some light occupation in the surgery, and there hoped to remain forgotten; he knew they were in the house, and through the wire-blind had seen the twenty-seven packages and the black bonnet-box carried into the passage by the cabman. Dr. Nichols was far too thoughtful to send the boy out to help, and he had heard them enter, heard Rose's "Where's Arthur, Uncle?" heard the reply, "Busy, little one, in my surgery!"—heard them go upstairs to the drawing-room, and Mrs. Nichols come bustling forth to welcome them, all in a flurry, for the good lady had not expected them until evening, and was overtaken in the midst of pastry and preserves. But then, as Mrs. Blake pertinently observed, "one gets another day in by leaving home early." Arthur was at work redcapping phials, deftly white-papering bottles, folding up and tying them round with neat care and nicety. A doctor

may have ten boys in his service without one possessing sufficient skill.

Then he heard a step, and saw the surgery door opened a few inches, and some blown tresses, gold against the brown of the door, and sunlight in the dull retreat, and a row of little pink fingers holding it open, the prettiest little nose conceivable, two wicked eyes, and a brow clear and open as the day.

"May I come in, please?"

"Yes, Miss Rose!" and the boy blushed crimson; he could not assume authority with her as with that other.

"It is nice in here, but doesn't smell half so sweet as Papa's shop, but that's because you haven't any perfumery! Well, and how are you, Arthur? We have so missed you!"

"Thank you, miss, for kindly saying so; I am much better. I hope Mr. Blake is quite well!"

"Yes, thank you, and he has sent you by me this little present for pocket-money, with his kind remembrance, and hoping you will be happy in London; and I was to be sure and say, that any time if you like to come back to us you can do so!" She handed him a sovereign, the gift of his late employer.

"Mr. Blake is very kind, and I thank you, miss; although your Uncle is so good to me I scarcely ought to take it."

"Never mind that, put it in your pocket, and—here's some sweets I've brought; and a pair of muffatees I've worked for you, because I thought your hands would be cold; and—I hope it won't make you miserable if I tell you, Arthur—I've been every Saturday afternoon to the churchyard, and have put fresh flowers on the grave where we went the day before you came away! Now don't cry, Arthur, we won't speak of it again; only I thought if I told you directly I came, we could be all the happier afterwards, and I shouldn't have it on my mind that I had got to tell you."

He could not help a few scalding tears, but dashed them away, looking up from the misty bottles at the small kind face that seemed pale and thoughtful; but that look of his was beautiful, so full of gratitude and fine appreciation.

"Well, and now what have I to tell you?" seating herself aloft on the one high stool, and gazing with a comical shudder at the leech aquarium, with the remark aside, "Papa's got some of those horrid things!"—then looking down and thinking, while the doctor's page quietly proceeded with his work. "I've some canaries, Arthur, beauties! Two sing, and the others don't. Mr. Garland gave them to me, and a splendid cage, and I have them in my play-room at the house."

"Mr. Garland is very kind to you."

"And Mamma has a pony chaise and two ponies. We shall often take nice drives now; it won't be so very much out of the way, as we can drive into Brighton."

"It is a long way from the town;" and, with a choking sensation, the boy brushed his chips and cuttings aside and, begging to be excused, quitted the surgery.

Next day Rose wanted some fruit, and asked permission to go out and buy some; and might Arthur go? They set forth upon their errand, and made the purchase, and were returning, when the meagre, stooping form of the old musician came in sight; with him Amy, almost herself again, and piquant as a young gipsy; she caught sight of her nurse and his companion on the instant. The boy flushed, knew not which way to turn, and, rather vexed, marched on as though having to return immediately to his employment. The old man passed without heeding the boy. Amy gazed earnestly at Rose, with that playful impudence young Bohemia displays when critical upon those of the same age higher in the social scale. This led Rose to look back, and she was surprised to find the other similarly engaged. "Well," said Rose, "that girl could not have looked harder if she had seen one of us before."

"It is one of Dr. Nichols's patients, a little girl who has been very ill, and I had to take medicine to the house."

"Well, I shouldn't have thought she would have come to the door—saw you from the window perhaps."

Arthur considered the whole affair so much more the doctor's property than his own that he accepted the justification, and said no more about it, and Rose skipped on with her bag of fruit, apparently content.

"Is Joseph still on the Council?" asked Dr. Nichols at dinner.

"Next year, brother, Joseph will be an Alderman," and Mrs. Blake looked majestically at her sister-in-law as if to say, "Wouldn't you like your husband to stand in the way of such honour?" Majesty very much subdued when the doctor observed,—

"Well, Margaret, I have never gone into the subject, but *I* could not devote valuable time to parish and borough matters."

"It is a failing of our family, brother, to be born with large ideas; dear mother always said, you know, I ought to have looked higher than a professional man."

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Nichols. "What can be higher than a professional man?"

"You quite startled me, my love," said the doctor a little nervously, "I thought you'd a bone in your throat."

"Well, a SIR, for instance," replied Mrs. Blake, "it must feel very pleasant to be addressed 'My lady' this, 'My lady' that. Now I've an idea such a distinction confers great honour."

"It never struck you, I suppose, Margaret, that it is possible for a lady to confer the honour upon such distinction. Shall I help you to a little more sole?"

"I have no doubt," said the sister-in-law sweetly, "that Margaret will be Mayoress some day, for it is not to be expected Joseph will rest content as an Alderman."

"Well, I did hear a whisper the town would appreciate Joseph's claim to election; but he is so retiring, you know."

"Soon retire altogether, I suspect," said the doctor pleasantly; and great harmony prevailed at the doctor's dinner-table.

CHAPTER XL.

THE REV. ROBERT EVELYN'S DIARY.

October the Twenty-first.

MEMORABLE as the day of our removal from Torquay. Don't like removals. Felt leaving the old faces; I believe most were sorry. A Tea, Presentation, and Address, all very satisfactory; the children of the Sunday Schools gave me Kitto's work—had one already, but valued it all the same.

Have experienced considerable difficulty with Constance, never knew the child so contrary before; didn't want to leave Torquay, would rather not go to Brighton, did I mind her being placed at school?—Anywhere rather than go with me upon my new field of duty; now this is most extraordinary; the girl must be demented.

The more extraordinary, remembering *old kindnesses!*

I was at home at once, upon driving to the comfortable house Mr. Garland has been kind enough to take for me; everything arranged as I could wish. Constance did not like it at all; found fault with every mortal thing; endeavoured, I thought, to excite my distaste; most extraordinary; cannot understand it. There is literally not a loophole for complaint.

All the evening Constance very disquieted, as unlike as possible to her usual calm, lady-like manners. I said to her, "You are feverish, my love!" holding her little hand in mine. She said, "Yes, Papa, and, if you do not mind, I will go to bed!" And she went, at 8.45; most extraordinary!

I rather anticipated a call from Mr. Garland, but I suppose he was otherwise engaged. What an embarrassing matter it

is becoming used to a new name, I was about to write—well, what I am requested not to write, nor speak, nor think!

October the Twenty-second.

A note by the morning post; would I call upon Mr. Garland, as he was so very busy? Called. Kind as ever; hoped I should enjoy better health in this more bracing air; hoped my daughter was very well: rather indifferently, I thought, but always kind; hoped our house was to my convenience; hoped Miss Constance was pleased with it, which Miss Constance is not, nor, I think, will ever be; most extraordinary!

Mr. Garland described my call as merely one of welcome; he would not trouble me about the duties just yet.

Went home; Constance in the kitchen, seeing about dinner. "Been out, Papa?" I told her I had made a visit of courtesy to our kind friend. "Oh!" she said, in an icy sort of fashion quite new to her, and floured the fowl with such vigour that I said, "Waste not, want not, my dear!" "Yes, Papa!" she said, with a curious manner I did not quite like. I fancy the change of air is not agreeing with my invariably good little girl.

After dinner I placed my books in position in their new quarters; alteration for the better so far as the room is concerned. Our friend is a marvellously thoughtful man; I am sure the relaxing climate of South Devon would have totally prostrated me, had I remained much longer. "I think it very likely," said I to Constance, upon her peeping in to see how I was progressing, "that Mr. Garland is coming to tea." "Indeed, Papa!" And she helped me a little while with my books and papers, and then ran downstairs to her housekeeping.

I was particularly struck by the extreme neatness and order in the house of our friend, although it is not furnished with anything like the luxury of this. I ventured, when he was alluding to this house, to say, "You have been too liberal in providing for our comfort;" whereat, with a pleasant smile, he replied, "You need a more comfortable home than I, that your daughter may be happy." And she isn't; most extraordinary!

I fancy if ever girl was brought up well, was taught con-

tentment with station, gratitude to Providence, thankfulness to kind friends, dutiful obedience, and modest self-possession, that girl is my daughter; and yet, with all my careful rearing, she appears to be developing an opinionativeness which is eminently grievous to a father in holy orders.

Upon ringing for Constance to come and sort my manuscript sermons, I was informed by our maid that Miss Evelyn had gone out! This did not so much matter—I thought she had probably gone to look at our new church; but the climax of her strange freak was realized when she did not come in to tea. I felt annoyed, because, had Mr. Garland looked in, I should have liked her to preside. But, as it fortunately happened, he did not.

Constance came in at half-past eight; had been for a walk, looking at the shops. I kissed her, and said she was a naughty girl to run away thus.

Sat up rather late, looking through the best of my sermons for future use when not feeling very well.

Caught Constance in tears over her work. Whatever has come to the girl?

October the Twenty-third.

After breakfast this morning I said, "If you will put your hat on, my dear, we will call and pay our respects to Mr. Garland." But there was so much to do in the house; and her morning dress was shabby, she must see about a new one; and she had letters to write to her friends in Torquay, which must go out by the 4.15 post; therefore, would I please excuse her? I did so, because unable by any possibility to turn her. I felt vexed, because, I admit it, I am proud of my darling; she is so beautiful, that wherever we call her presence is the most satisfactory note of introduction. I have found that out; but I have never known her to be so disagreeable as at the present time in this matter of Brighton. I have no patience with such extraordinary crotchets.

Called and found Mr. Garland closeted with some poor working man, who passed me with bowed head, but the most happy expression of countenance I ever witnessed. I was admitted at once, and we went to business. Our parish

seems bounded by the Downs, the Sea, Rottingdean, and Shoreham. "I recognize no appointed limits for the doing of good or distribution of charity, my dear friend," was the introduction to this tremendous area; most extraordinary! I confess I am more in favour of the streets immediately around the church, and I do not consider it orthodox to overstep the line of our parish; it is apt to give offence to one's spiritual neighbours; besides, I think the clerical rolling stone gathers no moss. Of course I did not make this admission to our good friend, whom I will join heart and soul in his great and broad system of charity; but such are my principles. Mr. Garland already has an able coadjutor in Spencer Webb, a capital fellow; only one thing against him—he's a Cambridge man! Mr. Garland was very kind in his inquiries concerning Constance. How queer he must think it I don't bring the child! I made all the excuses possible, but he is not like any one else; he would see through a brick wall.

Later, Webb and I called upon some of the people. Met my new Bishop on the King's Road—received my introduction with delightful courtesy.

Altogether, I am becoming accustomed to the exchanged sphere, and believe I shall feel very comfortable. Mr. Garland has an enormous congregation, chiefly dons.

Was much struck, when upon the road to-day, by a most haughty-looking woman. I was shocked by the imperious cast of feature, and thought its wearer needed reminding that the most disdainful of sovereigns must inevitably become as the dust of Egypt. Webb told me it was Lady Helen Darrell, a member of Mr. Garland's church, therefore I think it more than probable she has been already reminded of that great truth.

Mr. Garland looked in after tea. Upon hearing the knock my child blushed, then turned very white, and, aware of her intention, I stood by the door to prevent her escape, so Miss Wilful was trapped. But now ensued a most extraordinary circumstance. Instead of following the servant and entering our parlour, where everything was cosy and in preparation, he just stepped into the room I use as a library. Of course I at once went and remonstrated, begging he would take us

as we were, excuse homeliness, and so on. "I am always careful about intruding upon family privacy, Evelyn; I hold those rooms to be sacred, habitually occupied by the members of a family, and upon no account to be trespassed upon by strangers." Most considerate, I'm sure, but, in the interim, my bird had flown, and I cannot help fancying he did it purposely. All this is very extraordinary!

Sent up for Constance. Would I pardon her not coming down, as she had a severe headache? "Pray do not ask it," said our friend, "the change to this Brighton air often takes an unpleasant effect at first; I merely called to explain my dissection of districts, that yourself and Mr. Webb may equally divide the visiting." He took from his pocket a complete chart of streets in the poor and middle-class quarters, and I found my ground marked red, and Webb's blue. "By this guide you will avoid walking in each other's footprints, an inadvertence the poor resent; make no formality of the work—do not enter if the people are engaged—interchange a greeting and withdraw, calling at a more opportune season; tact and delicacy in this matter are half the battle. Do not press literature. If they seem disposed to welcome it, introduce the best we can provide—you will find one of the rooms in my house well stored. I shall feel glad if you will take, at discretion, whatever suits your purpose. And my housekeeper will receive the addresses of all to whom you desire wine, jelly, soup, beef-tea, broth, fruit, or plainer food despatched. You will favour my housekeeper at Hawkingdean with instructions as to flannel, blankets, hose, calico, or other clothing, that good lady taking supervision of this department. I shall place at your disposal a cheque for 10*l.* monthly, the sum Mr. Webb has been kindly disbursing for me—this will not, of course, relieve the most pressing cases of privation, these you will set down to my account."

This is, as closely as I can remember, the substance of Mr. Garland's pithy directions; and if he is not a good man, and one exempt from all temptation of the world, the flesh, and the devil, then my name is not Robert Evelyn.

Ah! Constance at the piano; that is the plaintive strain

we used to have at Torquay, but it seems long since I heard it. I do believe not since the closing of those pleasant evenings at Eagle Hall. Even Constance, dear child, felt the loss of those kind friends most deeply.

October the twenty-fourth.

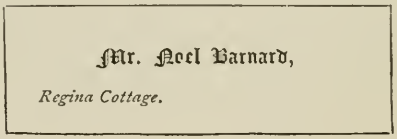
My poor wife's birthday. She never did like my keeping a diary, and would say that God alone needed to treasure in remembrance the good or ill of men's making, and that we should only preserve our daily memory of Him.

Yet I would not let such deeds as Westley Garland's go unchronicled; rather write in golden letters the veriest words and acts of that good man.

It will make it exeessively unpleasant for me in my relation with Mr. Garland, if Constance maintains this evident aversion, which is the most mysterious of all my experiences. After prayers last evening, when the servant had retired, I reasoned with my child, and very kindly, but all I could get out of her was this, "It is nothing, dear Papa, please not to take any notice of it."

To-day I prepared my first sermon for preaching in Brighton. I am to deliver it at evening service on Sunday next. I hope that proud woman won't sit directly opposite, transfixing me with her defiant stare. I always feel a degree uncomfortable until I become used to a pulpit and the people.

My servant with a card. A gentleman would like a word or two with me! Certainly. I pin the card here for future reference:—



CHAPTER XLI.

A BEAUTY QUEST.

Few men in Society were more popular than Lord Frank Ellerby: a wit, refined and with great taste, he was excellent company, and in much request. Lord Ellerby's house in Brighton was a complete art-collection, where the rare and the beautiful blended in delicate rivalry. He had a passionate admiration for the beautiful, and even as some statue will soothe like a song, some face like the cadence of rare music, this connoisseur of the exquisite had been spell-bound before a picture. It was at the Royal Academy. A warm afternoon, a crowd, for it was one of the closing days of the exhibition; Lord Ellerby had but recently returned from Switzerland, and ventured the fatigue and braved the crush in the interests of art. He had strolled through the galleries, not over-impressed; had taken everything as coolly as possible, and with undeviating good-humour, and was about leaving when his attention was caught by a face upon the canvas, so uncommon and so perfect by all the laws of loveliness that he brought his weary saunter to a stand-still, revelling in a fairer vision than he had seen in all his travels.

"It's the artist, Ma. Look how he's admiring it!" Thus inferred a spectral maiden.

"Don't see anything in the picture, my child; extravagantly unreal. Come along, there's a lovely Punch and Toby!"

On another side,—

"Striking face that, Celeste?"

"Oh, do you think so—is it clematis or jasmine? A pretty

framework—don't see much in the face. Mrs. Macdonald, what do *you* think of the face?"

"Wouldn't hang it in my nursery. What's the next? Potiphar's wife—That's a sweet study! Let's sit down."

The absorbed critic also sat down, but the people's talk seemed sacrilege.

He turned to the catalogue and read,—

"104. Flora. Portrait of the Daughter of J. Arthur Anderson, Esq. Millett."

Yes, that was the name; of course he was no wiser, but he felt a strange gladness it was not the daughter of some high and exalted personage. Yet Mr. J. Arthur Anderson might be as unapproachable.

One other matter gave him gratification—there was no Red Star upon the frame denoting it Sold. He would return in the morning when the place was quiet—he would be first, and view the picture at his leisure, when the gallery was flooded with cool morning light—he would view it from a distance—he would examine it close, with reverent attention; read it, line by line, like some wondrous poem, when there were none near to comment upon his actions.

Awkwardly—most awkwardly—he had trodden upon an old gentleman's toes. The old gentleman swore. He apologized, and walked over to Potiphar's wife. He saw the old fellow in front of the picture long afterwards, and experienced a jealous pang, as though he had an interest in the daughter of J. Arthur Anderson already.

He quitted the Academy, resolving to return in the morning.

He leaned back in his carriage with closed eyes, musing upon the face.

"Flora!" he repeated to himself, and if it was the girl's name, it did not take his fancy.

Long before reaching his house near Regent's Park he had resolved to purchase the picture on the morrow. The more he recalled that pensive face the more he loved it, and "To-morrow," he repeated softly to himself, as though afraid the very wind might forestall his purpose.

At home he walked about his rooms, set the gas and tapers burning, fancied he saw it upon the walls, or carefully veiled upon an easel. He would hang it here in his study; no, there in the drawing-room; nonsense, it should not hang at all, the sun would fade the matchless bloom upon the cheek, the air would injure its delicacy, dust or smoke would sully the fair purity. It should be in his bedchamber upon a dainty rest of fine Swiss carving—daily his morning welcome—and tapers should burn before it while he passed with it into dream-world.

They had barely opened the doors at the Academy before Lord Ellerby arrived. The officials imagined him a student; he passed them with a civil "Good morning!" feeling a little ashamed of this infatuation, yet it was as strong upon him as on the preceding day.

He made for the gallery. Room VII.—Somebody there! And before his picture!

He felt wicked, for he recognized the ferocious old gentleman whose corns he had assaulted.

He had probably been there some time; and he would probably be more polite in the morning than in the evening, for when he saw his lordship making for the picture he kindly bustled away. His lordship was grateful, and thought better of the old gentleman. A philanthropist, no doubt; one living unselfishly for the good of others! He was thinking thus when the Price Clerk came and stuck a Red Star upon the frame of his picture.

"Not sold?" he gasped.

"To the gentleman who was here five minutes ago, sir!"

He staggered back, and hid the face from his eyes, for it burned with regretful pain.

To fancy it the property of that old Goth! Some Manchester millionaire, no doubt, with the art tastes of an auctioneer. To imagine it upon the wall of some wildly vulgar drawing-room, where the entire arrangement was an outrage, in a hideously big red-bricked mansion! It was desecration!

Would he be open to consider an increased offer? Just the

man, no doubt! He would discover his name, and address; would treat with him, would open golden negotiations forthwith, the Vandal should not escape him!

One look—fond, but not the last—and away to the Price Clerk. He was politely allowed to inspect the Form. The Price Clerk was interested. His lordship explained the circumstances. The Price Clerk smiled kindly. His lordship noted down the name and address. The Price Clerk looked grave. His lordship caught the infection, and waited.

"I'm afraid you'll find Mr. Grannett a hard one to deal with, sir; he looks a close-fisted one!"

"I—am—sure of it!" replied his lordship collectedly.

"I remember last season he bought a painting, and one of the frame corners was chipped: the trouble he gave us about that piece of business nobody knows."

"I am surprised the portrait is for sale at all! Who is J. Arthur Anderson?"

"A gentleman at Clapton; the young lady is his only child!"

"You know them?"

"Not at all! I heard Mr. Millett speaking of them."

"A long sum was paid him, I doubt not, for painting it; it is exquisitely done!"

"A long sum *was* paid, sir, but by Mr. Millett himself. He was struck by the young lady's beauty, I heard him say, and lost no time in securing it for his canvas."

"That seems to me a new way of working art; Mr. Anderson must be a curious person!"

"Something of a miser, I have heard; very wealthy."

All this had altered matters. If he could but interview Mr. Grannett he might buy the picture; but however that would end, to form the acquaintance of Mr. Anderson and his lovely daughter would be to attain the summit of his hopes at once.

"As a great favour, would you give me Mr. Anderson's address?"

"I do not know it, sir! Mr. Millett might perhaps give it you; he resides at Clapton!"

Thanking his civil informant, Lord Ellerby departed—Claptonwards. He had never been there before; he would improve his knowledge of London at once. He did not know where it was, but instructed his man to find it, and doubted not he would do so.

He did—after what seemed hours' riding. Lord Ellerby wondered what time next day Clapton folks could arrive home after visiting St. James's Theatre. He referred to his notebook:—

"*Jeremiah Grannett, Malachite House, Oak Grove, Clapton.*"

To calculate moderately, perhaps his man was double the time finding Oak Grove that he had been finding Clapton. Had his lordship been a foreign ambassador, anxious to secure an impression of London out in that direction, nothing could have been finer, but as it was he grew somewhat irritable. The Spartan composure upon which he prided himself, under which he thought to endure anything unmoved from hard words to hailstones, and which his friends called his confounded coolness, and his enemies his diabolic self-possession—this glorious quality which enabled a man, as he said, to light his cigar at that burning affair near Naples; quietly to undress when the balloon was descending swiftly towards the sea; easily and pleasantly to finish an article during a railway accident; calmly to brush one's teeth before doing anything else, when aroused in the dead of night by the cry that the stairs were on fire; to wind up one's watch while the ship was sinking,—this enviable, imperturbable repose was ruffled altogether by his beauty-chase.

When Oak Grove was found, Malachite House seemed likely to hold out the same trouble. A butcher's boy, did—no, he did not know Malachite House, stared stupidly, and vanished. A governess in black, with two red-haired children, did—no, she did not know Malachite House, looked frightened and walked on swiftly, evidently possessed with the idea that the fell design was theft of the saffron-locked cherubs. A draper's assistant, with a yard-stick he half ashamedly wielded as a walking-cane, and an emptied warehouse on his back,—no, *he* did not know Malachite House, 'didn't know the name at

all.' Next they hailed a brewer's dray, its ponderous progress was brought to a stand. Could the driver tell them where Malachite House was? That man swore at them; he didn't know no Malachites, and thought they'd had a drop too much! A policeman, did—no, the name was strange to him, he was fresh on that beat; then, thinking they were making fun of him, walked on indignantly. A nursemaid with an infant, thought they were making advances, frowned, and hurried on in the rear of the policeman. A lady—ancient study—ringlets, dog, knitting-pins, and reticule; no, she did not know Malachite House, but would help them to search for it with very great pleasure. They looked at one another, master and man. Lord Ellerby, retreating to shelter of his carriage, allowed his lackey to continue the quest at leisure; his lordship had, apparently, taken up his abode in that Grove.

Somebody else came in view, either a prize-fighter or an idiot. Would John interrogate, he wondered. Yes! And this splendid fellow *did* know Malachite House. John came to his master with a face quite radiant, and mounting, drove on for the house.

Malachite at last! And old Grannett doing something in the garden!

Lord Ellerby walked up to him.

"Ah! Good morning! Just turning out the slugs!"

This in dulcet tones, with a fascinating smile.

"You remember me, Mr. Grannett?"

"Can't say I do! Who are you, and what do you want? Parish doctor, I suppose!" with a sneer.

"I have not the privilege of being that person. But I—I had the honour of treading upon your toes yesterday!"

"The devil you did, sir! You were not the only one; they were at it all day. All London and the provinces were at that game yesterday, because it was hotter than usual! What have you come about?"

"A picture you bought; you forestalled me!"

"Thought so," rubbing his hands gleefully, and cackling like a dragon.

"Funny, isn't it?" said his lordship, with sardonic effect, whereon the other stuck his spade sharply into the mould.

"My time is precious, sir; state your business, sharp!"

"I'm obliged to you, but my medical attendant expressly forbids excitement. A word with you, leisurely; perhaps—a breakfast room?"—pointing to a shady retreat, glowing with chintz.

He hobbled off in that direction, fuming.

"Charmingly laid out, sir, your garden!"

He turned sharply: "It'll be a shilling when it's open to the public!" and they stepped into the breakfast-parlour, very prettily furnished, pale green and gold; beautiful heads, female studies chiefly, upon the delicate paper.

The old gentleman gruffly motioned to a chair, and his lordship began business in earnest.

"I want that picture removed to my house instead of yours, Mr. Grannett. What will satisfy you?"

They eyed each other keenly. Mr. Grannett twitched off an anti-macassar, made a ball, and took aim at a fly upon the nose of a classical master-piece.

"Glad when winter comes, to get rid of those brutes. The picture—hum—well, double what I gave at the Academy!"

The visitor did not appear to exhibit any surprise; not because the exorbitant demand did not startle, but because he made it a point to avoid surprise. Mr. Grannett smiled grimly as he took out his cheque-book.

"Agreed! Oblige me with pen and ink!"

He did so—silently. And Lord Ellerby wrote in compliance with the extravagant demand. He held it between finger and thumb as if it would bite.

"You're the queerest customer I've had dealings with yet; and I made my money as a Broker!"

"Thank you," responded his lordship, with icy languor, for the old one was doubly objectionable on that account.

"You must—excuse me! Do you take a strong interest in the girl to give that amount for her picture?"

"I do; I admit it. Will you tell me where they live?"

It was useless standing upon delicacy with a man like that.

"I can; and will *give* you the picture upon one condition."

It was now Lord Ellerby's turn to be astonished.

"*That you marry her!*"

Composure came to his aid. "I shall be delighted," he said, and he meant it.

"Anderson, you must know, is a miser, a man of no principle, a thorough old scamp; in short—my brother-in-law!"

"Sorry to hear of the relationship," said his lordship.

"An old maiden aunt left Flora thirty thousand pounds, to pass from her use and possession the day she is married—"

"When, I suppose, the money passes into your hands?"

"Into mine!"

"Your proposal is very disinterested!"

This pleasant old man was improving rapidly in his lordship's estimation. He evidently stood as little upon delicacy as possible.

"I accept the picture." His lordship rose, taking back the cheque. "Give me the address. If I am fortunate enough to win the young lady's love, she will never know the loss of her thirty thousand pounds."

He fumbled at an untidy, dirty desk and scribbled it down.

"And now your written instructions about the picture, or they will not deliver it."

"To be forfeited if you never marry Flora Anderson."

His lordship signed to that effect and took his departure, never more rejoiced to quit a dwelling. Be Anderson what he might, he would not be as objectionable in his eyes as this old man.

"Where to, sir?"

He looked at the address.

"Hackney Gravel Pits."

"Beg pardon, sir?" The man touched his hat.

Lord Ellerby gave him the paper. Another case of asking; they might as well have been in the interior of Africa. Better! The general public would have been more enlightened.

They fortunately came upon a lady who knew the Gravel Pits, and every corner public-house between.

Arthur Anderson, Esq., The Willows, Hackney Gravel Pits.

"What business have men with lovely daughters to live in gravel pits? Intended for conies and such creatures—disgusting!" muttered his lordship.

They discovered "The Willows" at three minutes past five; the wind in the north-east.

"Lively situation!" and with a dubious countenance Frank Lord Ellerby stood by the gate. He glanced upward, and saw a vision at a window—a head like to the head of Molière's "L'Hypocondriaque."

He walked up the garden path; stones, not a flower anywhere—oyster shells, hardware grotto ornaments. A big slice of ground but no produce, not even a weed.

"Unhappy Anderson, Esquire! Let us hope thou art not so cheerless within."

Thus ruminating he rang a bell, which pleasantly trifled with the air some ten minutes; for that bell—truly an alarm that might have been heard in Westminster Abbey, traffic permitting—was suspended in the yard rearwards.

No response.

Calmly, nay pleasantly, his lordship waited, for he would not that the sun should go down upon his impatience; go down it would, if he had to wait much longer.

It was not a bell leaving any doubt about its being heard; a truly Shakspearian dreadful bell, that rang all over the pits and warrens.

He would not ring again, the clatter frightened him. The mare might bolt, or a fire-engine come dashing up. A hundred things might happen; he would not ring again, he would bivouac. He unfolded a newspaper, spread it on the top steps, sat upon the money-markets, and leaned his back against the miser's door. Disturbed by a cracked voice above, he leisurely raised his eyes to the altitude of a bedchamber.

"Go away, we've nothing to give you—not a farthing or a scrap in the house. There's a dog at the back!"

And a bell, he thought. He was taken for a mendicant; it was of no consequence, but the fact remained. The Molière head was withdrawn, and the window dropped like a portcullis.

He looked sweetly up and prepared for taking the fort. Baying of a bloodhound was heard from the rear, and he experienced the "Dred" sensation of the transpontine theatre.

But at this thrilling moment there was great rattling of bolts and bars and chains, and the door opened.

Anderson, Esquire, stood within, in his nightcap, a napkin tucked under his chin, a spoon in one hand, a gun in the other.

"How do you do?" asked his lordship cheerily. "Poorly, I fear," commiseratingly. "Mr. Anderson, I believe," reassuringly.

And then this pleasant Papa of the future spoke—with groan accompaniment.

"What do you require?—Speak, or I will not answer for the consequences!"

"I have called upon a little private business, if you—"

"State it where you are, sir; I admit no strangers."

"If you wish it—I am desirous of investing some money to the best advantage—I dared to think you would advise me, your experience is well and deservedly known."

The nightcap was knocked off, the hands clutched the dressing gown, he shuffled a step or two nearer.

"It hasn't done me much service—I'm wretchedly poor. Walk in."

Suddenly he turned,—"Is that your shay?"

"If you like, facetiously, to call it so, it is."

"Horse you're own?"

"Very much so—in exchange for a hundred guineas."

His metallic old eyes glittered.

"Man you're own?"

"In my employ."

"Just tell him to see the brute don't nibble the laurels next door. I can't pay any damages of that sort."

His lordship gave the necessary instructions, and then followed Mr. J. Arthur Anderson into the house.

He found a spacious hall, with nothing in it. A spacious back room, no carpet, wooden chairs, and a deal table. This was the tent wherein the patriarch dwelt. Not oppressive with luxury. It presented economy under a restrictive aspect.

"Be seated!"

His lordship tried one of the wooden chairs.

"I have a thousand pounds, Mr. Anderson, for investment! I like to drop a thousand each year into something. I have the honour to be interested in everything, I think—from Penny Steamboats to Petersburg Photographs, not to mention Gas Companies, Foreign Loans, and Railways."

"Your name is Cook?"

"Unfortunately no! I am not that great man, nor connected. You simply have the pleasure of beholding Frank Ellerby."

"Lord Ellerby?"

"Yes, men are good enough even to use that handle. To my friends I am Ellerby—Ellerby to you, if agreeable! Can you oblige me with a glass of water?"

Lord Ellerby wanted to see this daughter, and for that would endure his aversion—the tasteless fluid.

"With pleasure! I am glad you drink water, we cannot afford anything else!"

"Hard times!" and his lordship sighed sympathetically; although he believed the old man possessed more wealth than himself.

He walked nimbly to the door. It was astonishing to see the change for the better in his malady; and he screamed upstairs,—

"Flora! Flora! A glass of water directly—see the tap isn't left running!" Then to his visitor, "Between 'em they waste more than their heads are worth!"

His lordship was inspecting, out of the window, the back garden, with its wilderness of old tiles and bricks (Mr. Anderson brought one home in his pocket every time he went out, and did his own repairs), at the dog-kennel without a roof, and the dog which seemed couchant to prevent his bones being seen; at a corner heap of old gallipots, and a water-butt fall-

ing to pieces. This and a magnificent stretch of garden-ground apportioned as a chicken-walk where one cadaverous fowl was supreme autocrat of the bare domain. He was looking out of window at the back garden, and he knew that she had entered.

He had heard the gentle footfall, and the low-breathed sigh. He would prolong the thrill of anticipation no longer, he turned, to realize his beautiful vision, and—

Confronted the most hideous maiden that was surely ever permitted to go forth unattended!

Meagre as the dog, wizen-visaged, angular as Euclid, ghastly complexioned, grisly-locked, and in black silk worn to an absolute bronze.

He wondered what Millett had thought of this Pre-Raphaelite saint of the Gravel Pits.

She handed him the water in a tin mug, the old man grumbling,—

"Where's our glass?"

"Brother dear," responded the spinster, "it is broken. I would have told you before but for your illness."

An imprecation escaped the old man.

"The second this year. Well, you'll have no more!"

The lady of ripened charms looked resigned, and took the goblet from the visitor's out-stretched hand. His face was averted, for he could not look upon this study.

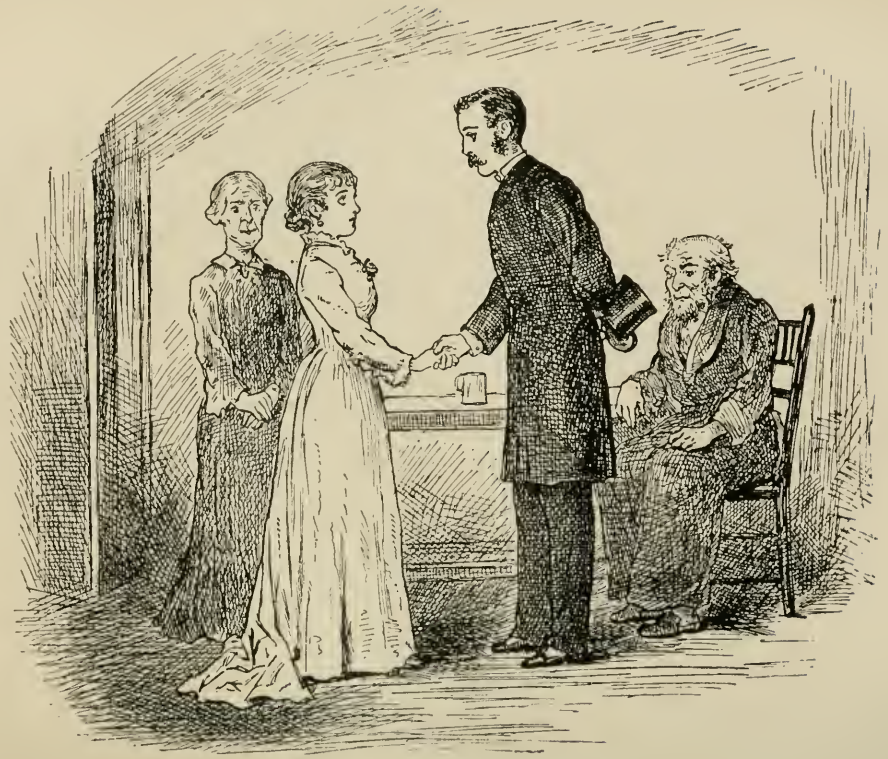
"Where's Flora?" His lordship's heart bounded.

"Tacking patches on your stockings, brother; they're too far gone to darn!"

"Well, we'll buy no more this year. It's ruinous! Tell Flora to come here!"

The maiden retired. His lordship began to think the Gravel Pit family a queer lot. But only till Flora came; then he forgot all.

Such matchless loveliness he had never seen: how ever it came of such parentage seemed the mystery, and remained so until one day the old man produced a miniature of his dead wife: there were seen the features, and the Titian shade of hair, and the lovely dove-like eyes. A beautiful woman; and well



"My daughter, sir! Flora, love, Lord Ellerby."—PAGE 413.

he had loved her, for his voice lowered when he spoke of his lost wife, and his thin hand was shaking as he took back the picture.

Lord Ellerby was not surprised that Millett had been glad to paint the face; it was worthy his brush. Do not think it was an ideal saintly dream, or the splendid tenderness we associate with the Madonna's face; it was far too human: wickedly mirthful as the faces of those loving little Italians who beset the Opera doors in Naples. He was very fond of those Saint heads—in pictures; in life, give him wickedness!

"My daughter, sir! Flora love, Lord Ellerby!"

He shook hands with Flora. He did not tell him this was a Beauty Quest, that this was the aim and end of his journey. And how did he feel concerning Flora, now face to face with his ideal? Candidly she surpassed all he had imagined, and it was beauty that would increase—mature with the years. He was satisfied, was more than compensated.

Later, he heard it was a dream of the old man's heart to make this girl, his pride, wealthy, after he was gone; and for her sake did Lord Ellerby forgive him his penurious habits. He loved her, after a curious fashion, even before his gold, ay, and before his life. Else, when she stood but as high as their deal table, and a fire broke out above, would he have dashed so madly into her blazing red-hot bedroom, and torn her from the little couch at risk of life and limb?

Lord Ellerby learnt before he had done with him, and robbed him of his pretty flower, to respect and feel for the solitary man left alone with his crotchets in the miserable large waste of house and waste of world, where there seemed no gladness and no comfort. And he respected him doubly for this, that when the time came for asking of him his treasure, he did not, as the bold suitor dreaded, refuse, but left it in her own wise hands. And he who had won the love then won the choice.

But Frank Lord Ellerby had no pity for the lonely old man, none; he took her away, as proud of his bride as was ever English noble, and as worthy of her. And once his own, he

had the gratification of discovering that beauty, which he was ashamed to say had been his only quest, was the least of those graces which go to the adornment of wifehood. Lady Ellerby indeed was possessed of innate refinement, that shed lustre even upon her new name and title, and the charm of intellect and quick appreciation of the beautiful rendered her a fitting companion in every respect for the gifted young peer. At last his creed and his faith had taken shape, and he was the proud possessor of a realized ideal in every particular. And if for this alone, his name is well chronicled, such examples being conspicuous by their rarity.

Sometimes he would remember that the dear are human, and that the doubly dear are doubly human, and that beauty is but a shadow; but then, with that cheerful philosophy, his strongest point, he would say to himself, "And I believe in shadows; the world would be a bare, blank, fierce hot wall without;" and would think his beauty-quest at least had the moral of Bacon's words,—"That is the best part of beauty which a picture cannot express." Yet the picture was passing fair, as she would sit between him and the open window, looking upon the sea and the glorious autumn sunsets of Brighton; between him and the flowers; standing forth from the sky with its ruby and rose, from the sea with its flushed sheen of green and of gold; a face small, classic, profiled like the most exquisite cameo graven or carved of Italian stone; a form slight, symmetrically made; a sculpture all sweeps and curves and lines of grace in rhythm one with another; a fair flower-wife, delicate, gentle, and good, and with a soul—this represented much to Frank Ellerby. "I meet so many soulless people," he would say, "especially in England; I attribute it to absence of scenery, and to a lack of the poetical!" One day he was speaking of this to Flora, and he said,—

"If ever I saw soul written upon a man's face, I saw it to-day. I could not help asking who he was, and I was informed the Rev. Westley Garland! I am sorry to say I never went to church very much before my Flora directed my steps thither, but I certainly think we ought to settle down somewhere; I am disposed to like St. Michael's, but we will go

and hear this famous preacher, and if we are impressed as much as are others of his hearers, we cannot do better than take a pew at his church, supposing one is to be obtained. By the way, my love, you must read his new book. I read it in Paris."

"In Paris?"

"In Paris, where a translation was published simultaneously; the work is popular there, as it should be, extolling one of their celebrities! I see there is a notice of the book in the *Buckingham*."

"Read it, dear; I should like to hear what your favourite journal says about it."

Lord Ellerby read aloud from the journal quoted:—

"The Rev. Westley Garland has again astonished the world by another eccentric production, in which the flowers of a gorgeous rhetoric seem scattered broadcast as usual; but we think a deeper meaning underlies this romantic study from a life of the last century—that it is wise to preserve a brave heart, come honour or dishonour, and patiently to work on, wait on, even in the very face of poverty, calumny, and trouble. The Rev. gentleman has added one more judicious selection from great lives in illustration of those noble truths it is his invariable custom to impress upon the reader, and while we dissent from the poetical rhapsodies into which he is often betrayed, this is rather an error of sensitiveness than of taste, and we cannot but commend the general elegance of the composition. As a dainty reflex of the wonderful changes in a remarkable career the work is worthy of attentive perusal, and we thank the author for this artistic little drama of seasons. But while doing so, our readers will readily understand that we do not endorse all the sentiments either of the Rev. Westley Garland or of the Viscount de Chateaubriand, whose questionable policy and inconsistency of action was at one period the scandal of Europe."

Lord Ellerby smiled.

"The *Buckingham* will have its rap, even in a review! Well, I think this cleric may feel pretty satisfied; it is a very fair notice indeed! The next thing is to send for the book."

His lordship, however, remembered this was to be obtained only of the author, and he decided to call, himself, for three copies. It was no great distance to the Minister's town residence, and his lordship elected to walk. Upon the way he met the Earl of Comdarlington, who at once offered to introduce him to the lion.

"So glad to have met you, as the chances are you would only have seen Webb, who transacts this literary business for Mr. Garland. You ought to know the Minister; quite a man after your own heart, I believe,—a scholar, a poet, and a gentleman!"

Lord Ellerby bowed with a pleasant smile.

"You compliment me, my lord—but I don't mind it from you, because I am satisfied it is sincere."

At which Lord Comdarlington bowed with a pleasant smile, and having thus amicably enchanted each other, nobility presented quite a radiant pair of faces while mounting the upward road leading to the Minister's house.

Not one of the most imposing of roads, not high-rented houses, but eminently select.

The Earl presented his card; was Mr. Garland at home to visitors?

Mr. Garland was at home to visitors, but at that moment engaged; would his lordship step to the drawing-room?

A somewhat gloomy room; he had taken this house furnished, the trappings had seen the best of their days, the gilding was tarnished, the paint discoloured, but upon the table were choice volumes, works not discoverable in the ordinary drawing-room.

"An *édition de luxe* here!" the critical eye had detected the treasure in a moment.

"What is it?" asked the Earl indifferently; his tastes did not lie in the direction.

"'Les Arts Somptuaires.' Bound by Rivière, too! And I declare here is Didot's 'Paul et Virginie,' and 'La Pucelle.' Look at this, my lord!"

"No, thanks—don't care much for those unique specimens!"

"And here's a Capé, and Bozerain—'Le Moyen Age et la Renaissance;' and here is Wood's 'Athenæ Oxoniensis,'—have not seen the old friend for an age! And here's a grand affair!—'Les Emaux de Petitot, du Musée Impérial du Louvre'!"

"Mr. Garland will see you, sir."

They followed the servant. At the foot of the stairs they were passed by a poor widow woman coming from an audience with the Minister, and for whom these lords had been kept waiting until she had quite closed her pathetic interview. The Earl shrugged his shoulders, he did not half like this disregard of caste; but he knew one might as well try to convert a statue of bronze to any slighting of the poor or the unfortunate.

He was gravely writing, but, upon entrance of the visitors, wiped the pen with scrupulous care, laid it alongside others upon the stand, and, rising, bowed a little distantly.

"Good morning, Mr. Garland. Hope you are well, sir Allow me to introduce my friend Lord Ellerby."

The gentlemen bowed.

"Lady Ellerby is very anxious to read your 'Triumph of Seasons.' My friend here purposed calling for some copies, ran upon myself; disclosed the mission precipitating him at a speed quite out of the common—(a lazy dog in the ordinary way, Mr. Garland)—and, presuming upon very brief acquaintance, I undertook the pleasure of an introduction."

"Be seated, sir."

The Minister courteously motioned; there was no necessity for further ceremony.

"I think you are not looking very well, Mr. Garland."

"I have lost my proper rest of late."

"You apply yourself too closely to your studies in the still hours."

"These have been closer studies than usual,—by the sick bed."

"You have been acting the Good Samaritan again."

"A poor widow's son and only stay has been near to his death, and their sole resources have thus been brought to a stand-still. Too poor to pay one of the respectable and presumably skilled practitioners, she—"

"Sent for the parish doctor, of course!"

"No, my lord, she came for me." The dry manner in which this was said was eminently discomforting, yet with so gentle an expression no one could have replied thereto. "Somehow the utterly destitute and unutterably wretched

have confidence in what we Gospel ministers denominate Prayer, and while her son lay dying this poor woman thought of myself,—thought my imperfect utterance was of more likely efficacy than her own."

"Quite right!" cried the Earl approvingly.

"Not so, my lord. I very quickly undeceived the heart-broken and timid mother."

"And you engaged in prayer for her. Very good of you, very!"

"No; I engaged in prayer with her."

The Earl tapped a silver snuff-box. Lord Ellerby looked with curiosity upon the speaker. He could not reconcile it with "Les Arts Somptuaires" and the rest. The Earl trifled with an elegant China silk handkerchief, as much as to say, "You mustn't be surprised at anything from our talented but eccentric preacher."

"Well, I hope the patient thus kindly watched over is recovering!" said Lord Ellerby, so feelingly that the reserved Minister thought well of him therefrom; and to himself, "I must get this Garland to come and see us, he's a fine fellow; Flora will be charmed."

CHAPTER XLII.

AT THE SIGN OF THE "SEVEN TUNS."

THE entertaining study of Natural History is successful in so far as it rivets attention and courts inquiry.

Creatures whose characteristics verge on the irregular repay at once the philanthropist and the historian.

The caravan of monkeys supports the menagerie; and the odd people of our acquaintance kindly sustain the interest of the tea-tables.

When the cynic of antiquity went searching for an honest man, he knew himself to be a humbug of the first water, yet was he accounted wise; our modern cynics think themselves to be wise, while everybody knows them to be fools. Between which we have the genus Eccentrics, with their pleasant commingling of foolery and wisdom.

The eccentric is an institution tolerated, criticized, admired, or feared, as the case may be.

There is the brief and brusque eccentric, and the eccentric always ailing, and the exquisite and perfumed eccentric, and the eccentric whose charm consists in excess of information,—they are all necessary to the tableaux of Society.

Eccentrics are dividable by species, the generic worth being rated by the bank-book.

The wealthy eccentric is an Art Patron of distinguished tastes!

The middle-class eccentric is a Peculiar Person not quite right!

The poor eccentric is a person to be avoided, he sometimes wants to borrow; he is sure to be unpleasant!

Of the First Division, the Man in the Lords takes pre-eminence: his idiosyncrasy proceeds from State pressure; the tilt of his marvellous hat, the jerk of his Homeric arm, the creak of his patent boot, the turn of his unctuous tongue,—these are the outer indications of the modern Atlas.

The Man in the Commons follows: he writes and creation reads, while the old women gasp "Wonderful!" He talks and creation listens, and the young women murmur "Beautiful!" At home he has a garden, and fidgets and worries that garden till it is bare as a billiard-ball. He has a wife, whom he comprehends in the domestic budget as a pin-cushion, watch-pocket, or any other useful appendage to the head-warder's chatelaine. He is vulgar, but is borne with for being in the House, and his singularities, odious though they be, are described as amiable weaknesses.

The Man on the Bench comes next: he is very clever upon Law, and very ignorant upon Human Nature; professionally he is more Bench than Blackstone, and as coquettish over his wig as a girl of sixty; privately he is mildly insolent, and ever administering small tranquillizing doses of the Queen's Statutes to his intimate friends. He is the idol of little boys about Westminster, and the oracle of top-sided edicts. Nobody can probe his wisdom, and his head is full of Equity as an egg is full of meat; his offspring numbers One, and because the youngster partaketh of the parchment order, he would go to law with Providence in a suit on colour. His gesticulation is mediæval, and his eye the misnomer for a filbert; but being on the Bench, and having a string of ragged capitals chasing his name over the public prints, he is much looked up to, is grand vizier and pasha rolled into one, while his oddities are traits of the constitution.

Then comes the Man in the Church: strong on polemics, pauperism, and punch, vestments, cuisine and scandal; a decided Christian, and orthodox chess-player; good at all sorts of Society meets, from fox-hunts to christenings; perfect at the dance, and somewhat oblivious of the thirty-nine articles; charitably inclined, but abstaining upon principle; given to the laying-up of treasure and the damning of moths that

would corrupt; partial to the Queen—with whom he would play dominoes upon the flags of St. Paul's, and having traditional regard for the Fathers, with the stereotyped contempt for Curates. The Man in the Church has quaint theories and unpleasant manners; he talks like a jackdaw and loveth the music, while mankind with awe-struck reverence listens to the echo.

The Man in the Peerage follows, whose dignity is not of ancient date, and who did not come over arm-in-arm with the great William: hence his weakness takes the form of making sign-boards of the backs of chairs, antlering the passages upon baronial precedent, cutting box into grotesquerie, using massive note-paper with an elaborate heading, and a crest upon everything, from the ferule of his umbrella to the family warming-pan. The Man in the Peerage walks or rides with an intensity of uprightness painful to people who stoop a little; in Church he repeats the responsive ejaculations viciously, as impressing the Scribes and Pharisees with the presence of a ruler, and he is nowhere greater, unless it be in the poultry-yard, where he disciplines and models. His eccentricities are redolent of arrogance of the most offensive type, and his maternal parent even is embarrassed in his company; yet is he exalted of men and the scarecrow of many an inscript.

The Man who Writes is another select oddity, of intellectual angles and a miscellany of singular graces; he has a hobby and rides it to death over the foolscap, nobody caring very much for his views, but pronouncing him exceptionally clever; they don't read his books, and let him alone, thinking the contagion more harmless than if it took the form of oratory; some of the people who come to dinner take away the loans of his genius, which they return as 'very fine,' without having gone below the title-page; with certain folk he is a superior order of being from having published something, and young ladies who scribble choice extracts in copy-books place him somewhere in a vacant niche between Tupper and Kenealy; but to the generality of people, especially his tradespeople, he is an amiable evil, necessary in

a mixed constituency, without whom the grave comedy of life would be incomplete.

Then we have acquaintance with the Man who Paints; he has a studio, and it is appointed for all the world like the mere ordinary and vulgar artist's, but the conceptions dating therefrom are of a very different species, unconventional and wonderful, and boldly characteristic of the gentleman painter; queer studies, old saints with much gold at the back, fandango and procession, weird damsels, and grisly ones who may or may not be mammas-in-law, swart beauties trifling with snakes and other likely playthings, florid flowers in dropsical urns supposed to be chased with studies from the mythologies, but which would do as well for naked St. Giles sporting in a coal-shed; this is the sort of thing, and the people who want to borrow a little amount call and are in raptures before his art, and speak loudly of his mediæval idealism, his poetry of expression; other people call him a mistake, and think he should leave painting to those who paint for money and thus paint well; one old lady with curls speaks of him, with the door ajar, as Rubens the Second, but in the kitchen as a little cracked, she fears. The Man who Paints is eccentric, and dirty, but very nice, and somewhere, if it would but disentangle from its veil of extravagance, he possesses genuine ability.

This friend is nothing to the Man who Plays, who possesses the genius of concord, and discourses sweet anguish upon the instruments, grimacing the unities until the select circles he favours are seriously indisposed, and from that time forth under medical treatment. The legend runneth that once at a Penny Reading, where he had been solicited to charm the untutored, he so scared the chairman, the committee, the remaining fellow-beings, and the gas, that the latter went out, as also did the assembly, the pence mysteriously disappearing in conjunction. It is at the evening party the Man who Plays shines with true resplendency, and indulges dramatic scena with hysterical ecstasy upon the piano, until that accommodating board creaks as with influenza. The Man who Plays has singular and conservative notions anent the composers, and con-

siders the institution of notes a monarchic privilege. He is held in particular regard and affectionately remembered, especially during the night, when it is his idea music most soothes.

Among other well-to-do eccentrics whose glazed inscript honours our card-basket, note the Man who Doctors, and see-saws between Anatomy and Surgery; a charming fellow to sit opposite, at dinner; he, what time dissection of the turkey proceeds, looking at one suggestively and with a connoisseur's delicacy. He is a rigid scientist and strong believer in the good of pain; he would investigate the shadowy interior of his own pastor, and take a prince to pieces as coolly as a watch-maker would a watch; he has a weakness, and it is vertebræ; he cannot hold a book without reversing constructiveness, and when back meets back and there comes the tug of binding, he is keen at the scrutiny of its inner parts; he is a slightly uncomfortable gentleman to shake hands with, giving one the impression of for ever fingering for the small bones, and incisively outlining muscle with his finger-nail; he has a craze, and it is cutting up; he has been created reviewer and critic of flesh and of bone, and examiner in chief of the human carcass, and he performs his functions to perfection; he is pronounced clever but eccentric; all his friends are afraid of him, and humour his fancies from fear of falling into his hands; they breathe a higher atmosphere in his house, but take care not to be left in the room alone with him: his cook shudders over the dresser when he dashes at a tangent into the kitchen, and she once in a fit of terror served up the leeches in melted butter.

The Man with a Warehouse follows next, an important person in the country; he represents Import and Export, shipping interests and commercial prosperity—he is very wealthy, and will dilate upon the process on every available occasion; he is considerable upon literature of exchange, and bale and factory lore; he thinks he is the divinity manufacturers swear by; he is autocrat, and the great uncontradicted; an army of clerks tremble at his nod, and the wholesale is his hemisphere. The Man with a Warehouse has Ledger imprinted upon the

cover of his Bible, and is strict as to the business-like piety of his young men, who may devote twenty minutes (sharp) to dinner, and ten (sharp) to prayer. This latter he regards in the light of an appointment, and the young man late in, is reprimanded with the expressiveness used by the great man upon being kept waiting in the markets. In his large Manchester hotel he passes all night in feeling the warp and weft of his sheets, and in the dark could tell you the manufacturer; he will rise in the silent and not too lively hours to consult the last night's papers in the coffee-room upon the Indian and American prices. He is a large-hearted philanthropist, and having a great idea of being worshipped, builds chapels by the score, contributing to other erections upon being deferentially solicited to lay the foundation stones. He has one other noble trait in the composition of his colossal character—he is almost matchless at "shaving those city fellows,"—or, being interpreted, at out-diamonding those unequalled diamonds. The Man with a Warehouse is married; contrived to accommodate an impoverished nobleman, and took the daughter as an acknowledgment—he was so much in the market at the altar that, in reply to the clergyman's necessary questions, he said he would "take the whole piece." Afterwards they saw little of each other; although wealthy, he was very much too vulgar for her ladyship to get on with, except in the most distant manner. She alludes to him off-handedly as a good-natured but eccentric person, whose proclivities she is too eccentric herself to dare to meddle with; so she writes a little, and paints a little, and plays a little, and reads a little, and works a little, and chatters a little, all in a languid, senseless, vapid sort of fashion that makes mercantile eccentricity the preferable of the two to those who have the supreme honour of visiting. Their reading is choice if not general—his confined to the Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Wigan, and Liverpool press; hers to the novels, from which she extracts highly distilled men, pomaded, perfumed, and powdered to the most exquisite pitch—these she cherishes one at a time, and thus leads a very gratifying existence. Nothing can exceed the splendour of their residence, or the decision with which he

ejects his doubtful cottage-tenants. He is unfortunate at being judged hardly; one instance in particular is treasured by the vicar and company; it was when at a funeral he spoke of the mourners as "consignees." Of course the poor man was absent again, but having come into the money, his absence was not recognized by the uncharitable. People who think anything about him—and really not nearly so many do as he imagines—consider him a dry sort of man; but the money, if not the charity, covers a multitude of inequalities, and there can be no doubt about this money, for he is at any time willing to go through entries and double entries, day-books and ledgers, in support of it.

The Man with Land is an equally interesting study—his habits and customs command the most respectful attention, for he is emphatically ruler of provinces and governor in Egypt—he has what he calls a stake in the country, is an extensive acre-holder, has made *cent. per cent.* of plots, and expended no trifling amount in prosecuting gipsies over a nettle-tract the nomads prefer to regard as no man's—he also is eccentric, given to grumbling, and looking on other men's boundaries through blue glasses (he holds a mistake was perpetrated about Genesis time, or when chaos came out in leasehold a larger share would have been apportioned to himself)—he takes geologic ethics like truffles, and somewhere has a musty old will wherein he specifies the quality of mould he decides for the *ultimum remedium*. The Man with Land crows over his dust-heap until other birds peck at it, and then there is much fluttering. The prime strategy, however, is converting it to building purposes, and huge black and white boards crop up in view of city men going home on summer evenings, until some pioneer with a fancy for air and a wide tract thinks one of these old fields would be an admirable place to build a comfortable dwelling—plenty of room for a kitchen garden, and nice and near the line: it may be nice and near a swamp, but seeing there is only the wife and youngsters to live in it, that is not of much consequence. So a settlement is formed, and the Man with Land rubs his hands placidly over the post, for another town is set going. Anon the rows spring up, men

going home each evening see more progress, and as this is nearer than where they may be bound for, it is talked of, and houses let before the roofs are on, and foolish people brave all sorts of malady as though this old field were the edge of the world. Then a public-house is born, with a church at its tail, and the Man with Land is responsible for both, some other man creating shops and lesser and greater business marts. After a while a station obtrudes its impudent little shed, and the Man is one of the first to patronize the company's enterprise, just running down to see how things are looking. From frequent repetition of this naïve process the Man in the sere and yellow leaf is of largely funded interests, much looked up to, and generally esteemed. He has one or two odd ways, but these are mere harmless eccentricities, which of course every one has, somehow or other.

Quite of a different order is the Man who Buys old furniture. He, before this became the fashionable craze, used to be regarded as very eccentric indeed. He is fastidious as to period; neither an Anne nor a Louis pleasing him under certain conditions; he is suspicious of deception, and sounds Chippendale with the anguish of a Rubens-hunt; he knows that new things, from pottery to cabinets, are turned out as near the ancient as can be, and to obviate the danger of being taken in after all, he confines research to the old curiosities, as abounding in the weird dens where they store such, and from the ransack of these in the several big cities, he has corridors and chambers, and halls and staircases of quaint construction, gloomy of complexion, diabolical of carving, and altogether ugly; his calm but nervous housekeeper, who looks as though she had come in in one of the drawers, starts at every turn, and leads a life of martyrdom amongst the wood. The Man who Buys is well known to the brokers, and these gentry pounce on a specimen upon the vulture principle, attending the likely sales in his interests. It is an entirely new sensation, visiting at one of his overcrowded mansions, and afterwards experiencing something of relief upon catching sight of the homely and modern deal kitchen-table. A few pieces of this sort of ware go a long way, but when it comes to weighting

every floor until they groan, it *is* trying to the nerves, as the housekeeper thinks. Altogether this refined taste, like a good many others, pleases nobody so much as the owner, and as that is the main point, not to put it selfishly, the world wags on about the same, perhaps a little more comfortably, for some of its lumber being cleared.

A very charming person is the Man with a Cellar, eccentric upon vintages and brands, who possesses wines of classical history, from cellars of sovereigns, centuries back; he is a connoisseur of the most delicate palate, and will define the bouquet to the tenth of a shade; the chances are you will be invited to those lower regions where the very spiders partake of the richness of barrel and bin, and the dust is a tapestry of wonder; if you are strong and return alive, it will be a journey to remember. His one weakness is this cellar, and unfortunately for the friends who look in so often, nothing ever comes out of it; no, the nectar upon which they are regaled is bought in cheap dozens at the family grocer's. They are none the wiser; the Man has a Cellar, *ergo* they have drunk juice of a most choice grape.

Of a calmer order of eccentricity is the Man who deals in Railways, who has a finger in everybody's loop-line, and a junction at his back-garden gates. His drawing-room is playfully stocked with models of the chief English and Foreign lines, and Bradshaw, elaborately bound, lies upon the centre-piece of walnut. He divides Society into first, second, and third class, and the footman who ushers in his guests is instructed to make them show their ticket. Theory is based upon a system of shares, and principle runs smoothly upon sleepers. His library is voluminous upon routes; Murray is held in especial honour, his files are weighty with the railway organs, *Herapath's*, the *News*, and the *Times*. He is never at rest unless rushing off upon some journey or other, and the testimony of his family is that he is a slightly uncomfortable gentleman to reside with. He gives dinner-parties, which to his wife he calls netting the directors, and his little meetings of solvent shareholders have become proverbial for taste. He knows the antecedents of all the locomotives,

and his little people are named after the same. He has a large family, which he jocularly attributes to having travelled so much. He calls his dining-table a refreshment buffet, and buys chiefly of the railway contractors, in whom alone he believes. His wife's boudoir, to her horror, comes out before her most studied guest as the cloak-room, and their sumptuous bath-room passes as the lavatory, until the good lady, one Sunday coming home from church, is so incensed, she tells him she wishes he would lie down on one of his railways and be run over, when it might be he would have had enough of it. Altogether, as his mania pays and supports position, it is here and there tolerated, and they go into some good Society, where he is spoken of as immensely clever, and like all clever people a little eccentric; he hears of it somehow, and takes care to invite these people to the first journey probably time-tabled for a smash.

The Man who has a Theatre is always good to know; he is generally a fool, but that makes it pleasanter, since his beautiful "star," in whose name the commerce part of it flourishes, will smirk to you behind his back, and the Peri trip out of Paradise, to lay his ridicule at your feet. Having money, he puts his pieces on very lavishly, and is as oblivious to art and the artistic as to refinement in his galaxy of talent. His stalls are reserved for his set, and the ethics of slave-markets of the East are set out with anatomical patience. The Man with a Theatre always, somehow, under-calculates the cost of his enterprise, and terminates with an act-drop. He is generally friendly or otherwise associated with the Man who Breeds Horses, who hunts, jockeys, and steeple-chases, who is strong upon all four-legged matters, and essentially weak upon his own two, who is redolent of stable, and tremendous with horse-shoe jewellery, who can scarcely speak two words straight, and who keeps oaths as the grocers do their French plums, in bottles, but large-mouthed and always to hand. The Man with Horses is a dreadful person, but very popular; he is undoubtedly wealthy, although there is always a little hesitation in people's minds upon his origin; still he is pronounced a very good fellow. Should the Man

with Horses make a little mistake, there is always a cliqued championship to defend it, as an eccentric piece of work, attributable to the excitement attendant upon book-making. He is very intimate with the Man who Shoots; they meet at county-dinners, and over coverts, and are altogether much of a muchness, except that the Man who Shoots is more of the gentleman, and distinctively of the old school, which is a stamp of his eccentricity at once by latter-day ethics. The Man who Shoots has fowling-pieces on the wall, in kitchen, parlour, and hall, keeps shot-flasks and canisters on the mantels, alarms the frail-nerved on all sorts of occasions, must be for ever oiling and rubbing the steel, and is haunted by an idea each night that some vagrant is prowling—foxes for his poultry, gipsies for his peaches, or burglars for his gold cup—and sallies down in the dead of the night to the consternation of the cook seeing that the cherry-brandy is all right. Great also in the county, in the eyes of political partisans especially, is the Man in the Chair, the lofty and august oracle who is consulted upon everything, and is the great voice in all matters of vital importance; the Man in the Chair has a manner peculiar to himself, compound, jerking, effervescent, he is autocratic and yet smooth, as smooth as a sucked jujube on an iceberg. He is to an agreeable extent egotistical and insolent, but this only to intimidate the vulgar, who would make capital out of his grandeur; the Man in the Chair is not by any means to be trifled with.

There is one friend we are always afraid to see come in—it is the Man with Nerves. He is a shocking one to have dealings with, or even the merest passage of social intercourse, for he makes you start at his own supernatural noises (his backbone creaks like a snuff-box and his joints go off like small guns), and causes a strange creeping to ascend and descend one's entire structure; it is said that he is a little out of sorts, but the truth is, he is of all sorts, combining the grisly horrors of all the nervous fictions unmentionable at midnight. He is equally troublesome in the daylight. He will drop the cream-jug without compunction; and every one knows the confusion thus created, to say nothing of the mess; he will stammer

and stutter, and at the dance trip his partner every time below the chandelier, in his fear it is coming down; from this idea he suffers as acutely as did the famous Bertrand from another; to his dismayed vision screws are always wriggling out, and massy construction of metal about to descend and brain him; his keen eye can detect a crack in the timber before ever the timber has begun to weaken, and his subtle nose will trace gas in the room long before it has left the pipe. He is not nice to enter late with at church, as he will stop stock-still in mid-aisle and protest he can go no farther, although the pew-opener awaits by a comfortably cushioned haven just below the pulpit; and he will groove into the pew nearest to hand, albeit there is not room for another hymn-book. He has a comfortable little property, but is afraid of his gamekeepers, trembles at thought of the dogs, would not entrust his quivering members to the mercy of a quadruped, and cautiously avoids proximity to his servants. The Man with Nerves suffers from eccentricity in its sensitive extreme. He may and does visit most of the people of our acquaintance, but there is one he never visits—it is the Man with Daughters, another eccentric, and of the audacious type; for the Man with Daughters is for ever pushing the daughters down the throat of the Man who has No Daughters, until it is necessary to be on the alert to escape one or other of these damsels. They dress well, are accomplished, but have been so long prime movers in strategy that their veteran air intimidates; not one of nine has yet flown from the paternal nest, and each season the Man becomes more pushing. He is brusque of tone and business-like in manner, as though his stock was depreciating in value, and people knew it; he feels hardly used, after his trouble of rearing, and out of pique would serve the first of his sons-in-law with Leah in lieu of Rachel, for keeping them waiting so long; he has peculiar ideas, thinks the Man with Many Daughters ought to elect his own sons-in-law under authority; he ventilates this amongst his cronies until they, even, avoid him, as uncertain at any moment but the judgment may fall on their own unoffending shoulders.

We had the pleasure of meeting out some little time since

the Man who Brews, an eccentric of Conservative and fermented type, with ambition rising far above hopping level; he serves the Queen, not in her own jug, but in the bottled-ale shape, and in the House. He is destitute of refinement, of breeding, of manners, but is looked up to, and the great river from his vats flows from England to Peru, while his wealth is exceeding great also. He is fond of strolling into large refreshment places, where unknown; calling for a bottle of his ale, he will hold the glass up to the light with a knowing twinkle, and wink to its sparkle as to a son he might encounter in his travels in the act of distinguishing himself.

The man who brews is intimate with the Man with Bullion. Their villas lie contiguous, their sympathies are identical, their hard driving principles and crisp curt manners are the same. The Man with Bullion traffics on 'change, is properly impressed by the greatness of his avocation, feels a pang every time he sees the sacred name of Bank on the omnibuses, looks cautiously at a halfpenny to make positively certain it *is* a halfpenny before giving it away, stands upon the hearth-rug jingling loose coins in his pocket while studying the money-market, and times the arrival of all vessels with specie. Invited out, he thinks of but one thing—consols; he rates virtue by its cash-account, and will have literally nothing to do with the modest-incomed; his manners are dry and hard, he is without feeling; were it possible to mint his flesh and blood into currency, flesh and blood should go. The Man with Bullion is commanding, for he knows Mammon is the god of this world, and that he is his prime minister. The metallic flavour attaching to him is, in his opinion, a note of credit—he has flying loans out in Europe, and thinks even monarchs and princes would very often know short commons if it were not for the most useful of all their subjects, the Man with Bullion.

Far below, but curiously connected in an indirect manner with the preceding, is the Man who Speculates, and who, as a natural consequence, overtops creation one day, and is swearing at his wife in the lowermost depth of the valley the next. The Man who Speculates would not gamble for the world, nor join a lottery; nothing so uncertain. In all his delicate trans-

actions he stands to win, and he wins to stand, for if he loses he falls; but even then it is no fault of his immaculate speculativeness, but an imperfectly balanced and wrongly constituted order of things; and by some inscrutable reasoning the meek little woman at home, in the drawing-room she knows may be stripped before noon, is at the bottom of it. The man who Speculates buys public stocks and lands, and if the expected advance foreshortens, he is barbarous enough and eccentric enough to think it has been brought purposely about, as though Providence would interfere with stock-broking.

First cousin to this man is the Man who Contracts—he is more practical, more genuine, but infinitely less agreeable, looking up and down one, and estimating lowest contract price for running one up like us; he would contract with his own hens for eggs in return for grain and grub, and agree with a housewife at so much a year for the feathers working out through the bed-ticking—he will build you a church, he says, seventy-five per cent. lower than the Man who Builds, and as the Man who Builds is one of the old-fashioned, slow-raising ones, the Man who Contracts robs him of the job. Time is his great point—he will do the thing to time, where other men, or men's men, seem to have a singularly inaccurate dealing with that valuable possession. It is not in his working, which is doubtless admirable, that the Man displays his eccentricity, but in his private relations, where, not proving things going according to a system of contract, he storms and blusters in the face of time and everything else.

Very instructive to watch in operation is the Man of Auctions, for whom room is made while he pushes up to the rostrum, cheque-book in hand, extraordinary bargains in his eye. This Man seems born for one great end and purpose—to carry off the surplus furniture of public sales. The Man of Auctions is a gentleman—he is wealthy, he has a hankering after curious and antique works, he collects old china, dabbles in pictures, has some treasures according to Moses, but very few by the valuation of Smith, who has something to do with Burlington House; he is partial to old cameos, bronzes, and other hardware; and behind his dingy mansion he

has stored a variety of odd things, including a foot-warmer, said to have belonged to Julius Cæsar, and the shutter of the original ark.

In sober earnest, one has not to go very far in search of the eccentric, be it in high life, low life, or that middle stratum of which the true-born Englishman is so fond. The eccentric, the peculiar, the odd, the queer, the irregular, the unconventional, the anomalous, the singular, the particular, the strange, the whimsical, the droll, the fantastical, the grotesque, and the out-of-the-common altogether, may be met with at any hour; and, with exercise of patience and tolerance, a vastly suggestive study it is.

Seldom is opportunity afforded of studying as unique a quartette of eccentrics as were assembled, one evening towards the end of October, in the private parlour of the "Seven Tuns," an old-fashioned and highly-respectable hostelry in Bishopsgate. The firm of Barnard, Rolf, and Company, Merchants, Brokers, Commission Agents, Legal Advisers, Loan Discounters, Money Changers, Bill Negotiators, Freehold, Copyhold, and Leasehold Proprietors, Assurance Promoters, Share and Deposit Holders, and Scamps in general, had met for business; and an audacious and thoroughly villainous firm it was, but as eccentric as villainous.

First, there was the chief of the bureau, with his tall form and saturnine visage, with that trappish click of the teeth, and livid features, and the cold, grey, pitiless eyes. He was in the chair, leaning elbows on table, resting high cheek-bones on his clenched hands, and looking over these with lynx-like minuteness at his partners. On his right was seated Mr. Bartholomew Rolf, one of the most astonishing beings, so far as appearances went, who had ever patronized the "Seven Tuns." Tall as his chief, but older, he possessed the power of imparting a gravity to his countenance which comes of age, if not of wisdom; yet his head, and the general cast and contour, were of more gross and cunning type, and it was pretty evident, from outer signs alone, this man would not hesitate to perform much that his superior might decline. Mr. Rolf was bald-headed, merely a scanty circle of iron-grey hair round the

back; his features were florid, sharply prominent, and presented a voracious and wolfish expression. Mr. Bartholomew had been nurtured upon bubble companies and fed on forty years' frauds, and yet was extant, to meet his friends with the serious enjoyment and grave decorum of a board director in the hoar and honoured years. Upon the left, Mr. Stephen Miles, the colourless gentleman, with the unearthly roll of the eyes: the valued treasurer and specie-authority of the firm; whom, although so extremely indistinct of shading, the chief would on no account have lost from their respected number. Mr. Stephen's services were of an especially particular sort, and such as even by adding to their limited-liability company, might not have been secured again. Thus this esteemed *confrère* would on emergency forge like an expert, and could, if required, go the great length of discovering a fire at an opportune situation. None of this able band was remarkable for virtues, but without a doubt Stephen Miles was the most awful rogue of them all. The remaining member has yet to make acquaintance with the Reader,—to whom the Author's apology for the disreputable introduction. This was Coke O'Connor, Attorney-at-Law, retained by the firm upon a policy pre-eminently allied with human cautiousness, and, to render all strictly secure, admitted one of the firm. When Mr. Noel Barnard, influenced by motives of prudence, looked about him for a clever, shrewd, and conscientiously unprincipled lawyer, he came upon Coke O'Connor, probably the greatest rascal practising, and of whom he immediately thought highly, since he (O'Connor) had in a certain matter emphatically worsted the renowned Noel. The latter was not dilatory in any matter, and came to terms with the rascal at once, the process of which was characteristic and instructive.

"I want a man," said Barnard, "like yourself, to do some dirty work; only it won't do to be fastidious!"

"What do you stop at? What are the terms? And for how long?"

"We draw the line at bodily injury: terms, third of a half: time, unlimited; joining, *bona fide*."

"Good! I'm your man!"

"Legal counsel we want; men we can get by the gross, for our profits are large."

"You but qualify the dignity, sir. At what date will my services be acceptable?"

"Instantly. I know everything on earth, except the law, and that was always so unsavoury, I couldn't tackle it; but now I am determined to conquer the law, or, in my ignorance, the law may conquer me! The only defence an honest man has in this land is to master the law! What say you, O'Connor? Eh?"

"Your sentiments do you honour, sir," said O'Connor, much impressed by the supernatural twirl the tactician gave to one of his serpentine limbs, and thinking that if he had ever wished for the Evil One as a client, he must catch at this opportunity.

"Then sit down, will you? And we'll get to work!"

They sat down at the stained desk in a dull room of the dingy house where, as a bedimmed plate outside warned the public of London, Mr. O'Connor, Attorney, abode. They sat down, and studied hard for hours, the lawyer cramming that long head beside him until it seemed lengthened by several inches; went over probabilities, and went into possibilities; cut away round loop-holes, and hunted up risk, with its correlative of escape; bared all the elasticity, and uncompromisingly laid a veto on the iron and exacting. Any other brain would have collapsed: Mr. Barnard's increased its range, its clearness, its appreciation, and its insight, the farther they went, and the longer they kept at it. A spare youth, of much grime and many ink-stains, was despatched for slight refreshment, which the two devoured without rising from the desk, and pursuing the abstruse study all the time. Straight through all the quips of law, like another Cépola, whose "Devices" Coke O'Connor had the pleasure of introducing to his indefatigable pupil, did the Mentor cicerone his future partner; and, after a day of it, Mr. Barnard rose Master of the Constitution.

Mr. Coke O'Connor, like the three gentlemen with whom he was associated, happened to be a tall, gaunt man, with limbs that

he never seemed to know how to use, and which presented the appearance of having been fixed to the trunk in a hurry, and to have been selected at random from a heap: certain it is they were all odd, and always upon the fidget. Mr. Coke O'Connor's head seemed to have been elongated in a press. His clerk, the young gentleman afore-named, once stated that his employer had been hung up by the eyelids when a youth, a method of accounting for the telescopic phenomenon upon picturesque principles. The attorney's hair was very black, and he wore a sharply finished imperial; his eyebrows were peculiar, meeting at an angle in the centre, under which his eyes shone hard and bright as a pair of new shoe-buttons.

He was seated, as was seemly, *vis-à-vis* with the head of the firm. Mr. O'Connor's value had been fully tried and tested: Mr. O'Connor's advice had more than once proved preventive in cases where it might not have been as convenient of curing: Mr. O'Connor had fully substantiated his claim to the disregard of the fastidious: Mr. O'Connor had developed from a nobody, a mere obscure attorney, into a person of importance, to whom those in doubt or in difficulty resorted, to their profit, and to the profit of the firm in the background. Thus, representing the Law, for which the firm entertained profound respect—Coke O'Connor worthily occupied the vice-chair.

The firm had been assembled some few minutes; desultory talk opened proceedings; then the lithe white hand of the leader started up like a spectral finger-post, and,—

"To business!"

The solemn calling to order produced a dead silence, midst of which the awful orbs of Stephen Miles performed a solo after the style of the revolving organs of those coloured minstrels specially noted for practising the feat.

"Reports!"

From the president. O'Connor took from his breast-pocket some papers tied round with pink tape. He turned these down rapidly, selecting those required, and keeping the others beside him for reference. Then he cleared his throat, all his limbs working as though pulled with a string.

"CHEFFINGER!" said Mr. O'Connor.

"Hem!" From the president, serpentine below table, which Mr. Miles seemed to trace through the wood.

"Sir Claude Marston Cheffinger—Cheffinger Abbey,—five hundred pounds: as many thousand when we've locked up his cousin Dickson in a madhouse!"

The three long heads nodded, the eyes in the colourless head betokened intensity of relish. The legal member of the firm proceeded,—

"TRAVERS! Mother and child traced to Hertfordshire: George Percival, then at home, proved a friend—mother and child stayed at farm until she accepted situation as companion to a family in town. Child at farm now."

"Name of family?"

From the chief, over his tightened fists: calmly, yet with low-breathing interest, eyes like two sparks of fire.

"Sir Horace Vivian, Belgrave Square; young ladies about to visit Lady Vivian, who is staying at Nice for her health."

The chief looked significantly at Bartholomew Rolf; the look was understood; then he said,—

"We undertake to provide for Dickson Cheffinger!" and again his myrmidon apprehended the meaning.

"This Percival family seem bent on giving us trouble; Mr. Miles will see to this?"

That worthy bowed, and looked down on his finger-nails, one of which, greenish-yellow from a bruise, seemed to exercise a fascinating effect. The chief kept microscopic watch upon each member of the company.

"Proceed!"

"VINCENT! Son in London, studying at South Kensington: has received written information from Sleperton of a private visit to the Manor by Lord Lindon; with directions to—"

But the attitude of the chief stayed conclusion of the sentence.

"One moment—the motive of Lord Lindon's visit?"

"To ascertain for himself if correct that the mansion was being renovated prior to the return of Lady Lindon."

"And Mrs. Vincent knew of his lordship's visit?"

"They had an interview in the Manor-house at night."

"The widow's cue?"

"Making him additionally jealous and incensed, through—the Minister!"

"Clever woman, most consummate artist. Go on!"

"GORDON! Now at country studio of Lord Frank Ellerby, the aristocratic painter."

"Good!" The president might have been of German extraction, so guttural was that satisfaction.

"With him a girl, known as Lena St. Aubyn; quitted her home during absence of guardian; they are often together; his lordship has done 'em on canvas; very fond of both; the boy and girl contemplate some day going forth together, on search for something; don't furnish what."

Click, click, went the president's teeth, tighter clenched the fists; there was no other sign of emotion and marvellous surprise, not to say awe at the strange nature of that revelation, which perhaps no one could have apprehended with the same sensations. Then he spoke,—

"I will attend to this myself," and the three heads nodded in deference.

"ST. AUBYN! Of Yorkshire; employing three Private Inquiry and Scotland Yard detective offices, for the recovery of said Lena St. Aubyn, his adopted daughter: a reward, on the quiet, of one thousand pounds."

"Good!" Guttural and German again; the two serpentine limbs below the table described a circle as embracing something.

"BEECH! Bird-catcher; now in Brighton, been seen to enter the house of Westley Garland, Preacher."

"Confusion!" muttered the chief, knitting his brows; more Mephistopheles than ever.

"Attended a week-night service conducted by the said preacher,—"

"The fool!" breathed Noel, in a low and deep undertone, and with expressive contempt.

"Is at honest work," continued the legal adviser, with imperturbable gravity, "Cab-driver; No. 175: Cab-rank, Old Steine; Lodging, 13, Edward Street."

"Bartholomew, you will oblige?" The chief bowed gravely to Bartholomew; Bartholomew could not have looked more venerably serious had he been the chief's father.

"CADDIE! Investment. Secured a thousand: also Title-deeds to building property: effected through our Branch Office in the South."

President Barnard smiled diabolically. Treasurer Miles notched the table with thumb-nail as indicating dot and carry one. The president motioned the speaker to proceed.

"GARLAND! House called Moated Grange, Hawkingdean; underground passage from cellar, communicates with broken arch at foot of the garden, whereby the cavaliers of Charles's day might conceal or escape: now disused, passage closed up by means of locked doors; had the pleasure of securing the old key."

Saying which the lawyer placed upon the table a huge rusty key, of a kind sometimes seen in the doors of ancient churches.

This closed the reading of the Reports, and the industrious advocate refolded the papers with care, and tucked them, with other pleasant memoranda, under the tape.

Then the president rose to speak. He addressed the meeting with affable suavity, yet with that nameless superiority which arises of high-class education, travel, and mixing much with people in the higher walks.

"We are again indebted, gentlemen, to the estimable and faithful service of our trusty coadjutor; allow me to pass a few remarks upon our recent successes and future policy."

The president bowed, and, sitting down, assumed a profoundly ministerial air: there was a dead silence, the homage unmatriculated villainy pays to villainy that has matriculated; it was interrupted by Bartholomew rubbing his bald head as far as the fringe; it might have merely been the florid richness of complexion, but Bartholomew looked warm.

"I will put this in as few words as possible, our time being very valuable. To begin where our friend left off; a subject just now of most importance, since there is no doubt this Minister will, if he can contrive it, be quits

with us yet; he has gained one advantage, although not one of important service to himself, in securing the deed upon which I sought to obtain the Cheffinger signature. Now, gentlemen, to glance back a moment! After the Eagle Hall disaster we accomplished so cleverly, Lionel Travers, ruined, shame-stricken, melancholy, despairing, and half-maddened, fled from the scene, courting death before world-wide blazoned-forth dishonour; as though" (added the speaker bitterly) "that would avert it, or satisfy one determined upon their drinking the cup of humiliation to the dregs, and very dregs! He was rescued from death by drowning, and by a servant of Lord Guilmere's, who had the body conveyed, at the desire of his lordship, to their house; he was then tended by her ladyship, with the devotion a woman might display to her own son, and was lying there some days. Upon recovering, the repugnance to returning to old scenes, the supposition Beresford Travers would, believing with the rest of the world that he was dead, provide for his wife and child; and the scheme—as I understand it now—of clearing himself with all men and with his family, of honestly satisfying all demands, and restoring his wife to her old position; induced him to conceal his recovery and whereabouts both from her and others; and he seems to have entertained and to have successfully carried out a project at once clever and daring. Although, following upon his old inclinations, there is nothing so very remarkable about it after all. Through the interest of Lady Guilmere, to whom it is just possible he disclosed all, this Brighton living was procured for him by the late Earl of Heronby, her ladyship's father; and from an insignificant proprietary chapel his genius has raised this to the front rank of popular churches, and himself to the foremost of modern Ministers! I am careful to dwell upon this because it is so much the better for us! We have allowed this brilliant phœnix, hatched by reed and sedge at sunset, to acquire his full growth and fuller plumage, that we may pluck him a second time and with yet greater pleasure! Depend upon it, friends, this idol of the crowd and alchemist who has discovered the true secret of gold coining, has but one purpose at heart, and that I have explained to

you. For that he is amassing his hundreds and thousands; and so much the better for us; we will step in ere very long and undertake the care of this tithe and levy and tax imposed upon credulous Christians. Gentlemen, it is our duty to stand by the Christians—as the Christians have so often stood by us! Why should we see an estimable body of people robbed of their hard-earned savings? What are we? Are we vulgar schemers, coarse conspirators, dabblers in chicanery, and blunderers in fraud? No, gentlemen, but merchants and bankers, carrying on a system of operation based upon legitimate business, and with that ancient and honoured system of laying hands upon all we can, which established your ancestors and my ancestors, and which establishes their descendants!"

"Hear! hear!" from Mr. O'Connor, plucking tenderly at his imperial, while the awful eyes of Stephen Miles rolled from its point to the bald head of Mr. Bartholomew, and from there to the long thin face of Nero, where it dwelt approvingly while he proceeded.

"We will not go into a question of antecedents; you know we are *gentlemen*, and incapable of the low extremes to which uncultivated men venture in pursuit of gain, of position, of self-aggrandizement. I know you to be educated, men of wealth, family, and position, but you have distributed that wealth for the benefit of the world in general, you have quarrelled with the family accounting such quarrel profit, and have kicked position out of the balance, leaving that to lesser mortals; gentlemen, you have a grudge against Society, Society has a grudge against you; Society is proverbially sneakish, and if you don't take care of yourself Society will prey upon you—it is ever the fate of the innocent and unsuspecting; gentlemen, I commend your foresight. I have been to the wall myself (although half-brother to a baronet), and a very rough wall it is! You are aware *my* war with Society dates from a very early period, when my father, Sir Kinnaird Dalton, Baronet, conveniently played fast and loose with Hagar, the beautiful daughter of Jael-Ishmael, Reader of Stars and King over Gipsies, whom he met at Epsom

plying the calling of their people, and lied to under name of one Barnard. Thus, gentlemen, having in my veins the old but contemptible blood of Dalton to counteract the venerated royalty there engrafted, you quite understand how simple a thing it would be for me to perform an undignified and despicable action, and how morally and virtuously impossible it is for that action ever to be performed by myself?"

The chief looked round with the pride and importance of a plenipotentiary; the meeting was used to the strategy of the chief, and the meeting bowed back respectfully.

"Therefore, gentlemen, it would be an obvious impracticability to permit these Christians to be aggrieved and oppressed by this designing person, who is presuming upon a faith as ancient and honoured as my royal grand-parent's. In the interests of humanity we foreclose—the correct word, Coke?—and preclude further havoc in the sheepfold. I have been giving this painful subject deep reflection: I am disposed to be merciful, for we are all sinners, and although when a Minister gives way to greed it is the most sorrowful of all spectacles, yet we cannot tell but that, if we were exposed to similar temptations, we might do even likewise; thus I am placed awkwardly, the whole body of humanity upon one side, and this fallen nature, like a second Lucifer, gentlemen, upon the other! I will not admit sentiment to our conference, I have already decided without it; yet with all mercy, and, gentlemen, without overstraining that amiable quality. Our Minister shall hand over the whole of his ill-gotten gain to our better keeping, reserving only sufficient to carry him as missionary to those blacks who will eat him and his books after one of their triumphs of seasons!"

Which sally excited appreciative derision, Mr. Miles, being an admirer of authorcraft, especially enjoying the finale of their chief immensely. It was Mr. Coke O'Connor who ventured with,—

"But how is it to be done, sir? This Minister is an awkward customer to tackle."

"Our friend has spoken well," said the chief, with sententious brevity; "permit me to reply to the question raised.

A Minister is public property, his coat is for every fool to pick holes in; we who are wise may slit and rend it from top to bottom. Each tea-table in Brighton is busy at discussion of his merits and demerits, two-thirds at endeavouring to glean something derogatory to his character and reputation, the remaining third at inventing what the other two are seeking for. We shall not find it arduous assisting one or the other; the Minister, particularly the popular Minister, being pre-eminently a target for scandal. I'll tell you something—when Lionel Travers was at Torquay he rendered a service to one Evelyn, a poor curate, who possessed a beautiful daughter, whom Travers, all in a friendly sort of way, played Abelard to. Friend Stephen, I mark a naughty twinkle in thine eye, and I am sorry —not, sir, that all the Beresfords and Traverses are immaculate; my old pupil—perhaps thanks to my moral training—was always a model; but, gentlemen, Miss Constance Evelyn often visited the Hall, was friendly with—with Lionel's wife and with Lionel; of course the friendship continues, and—in short, gentlemen, I shouldn't be surprised if Brighton were to discover a very pretty scandal, very pretty indeed! And if any one here assembled can declare a more heinous act than for a Minister, courted, looked up to, a leader of public opinion, possessed of unequalled genius, foremost in the Church, relied upon by all good and Christian folk, not one of whom would decline leaving the most loved and jealously-guarded of daughters in his care,—if one here assembled can declare a more iniquitous deed than for such an one to mislead the daughter of his curate, let him declare it, or for ever hold his peace!"

With a look of mock horror and shocked and outraged indignation, the chief awaited any such declaration; the attorney murmuring,—

"Horrible, horrible indeed!"

"Thanks, gentlemen," said the president, bowing with native elegance, "for the confidence you repose in me. Well, our Minister shall totter upon his stand—and it doesn't take much to overturn a popular favourite, you know, especially in the Church. He shall be blackened, and whitened, and reddened with a vengeance; we have only to lower that

unbecoming pride and make his reputation a thing for every ignoramus to have a fling at; when we will threaten, if he does not hand over the wealth obtained under a false name—mark you, under a false name—to expose him, and disclose all. And if he shunned the public humiliation *then*, what will he do *now*, eh, gentlemen?"

"Good!" grunted Mr. O'Connor, with professional relish, for he considered his chief had made a point.

"And we will permit—we will permit the alternative of his quietly leaving the country—after transferring his passable little treasury to ourself. Very well, now supposing, being a high-spirited one, he kicks? Then, my friends, I will hold *his child* in reserve! Bartholomew will take a trip down to Hertfordshire and bring her to town, and here keep her until wanted: he loves his child, would have her with him, but could not as he is situated at present; and to the best of our belief he is ignorant of the child's hiding-place. He'll go quick enough for her!"

There was silence, only broken by Rolf mumbling to himself, "Child—Beech—Vivian—Cheffinger!" He felt his hands full, and did not want to forget anything. The amphibious-looking Stephen took out his lizard-green pocket-handkerchief and wiped the palms of his hands. Mr. Coke O'Connor pursed up his lips and said nothing, but stared hard and perhaps thought the more.

"Have I made it plain, gentlemen, this Minister is to run to the end of his tether and no farther?"

"It is irrevocable as fate!" Thus Mr. Miles with lachrymose effect.

"Very well, then we will drop this, and turn to other matters! Friday Street accounts, if you please, Mr. Rolf!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

GABRIELLE BECOMES CRITIC.

Towards the end of October, London was just beginning to put on that cheery look which betokens the fireside season. Crimson curtains displaced the muslin, and framed interiors, lighted up and inviting, tantalized the lonely bachelors journeying home from City work to comfortless rooms, wifeless, childless, fireless; pleasing, however, to those going home to such delights, causing wearied lips to wreathe with smiles while thinking of the rosy faces circled round the fire that would be all joy and gladness with the welcoming. From his seat upon the omnibus George Percival saw into many such a home at this drawing-in period of the year,—saw what he admired with so exquisite a refinement,—the comfortable fireside, the homely room, the children gathered about the tea-table. They were soon past, the pictures fled like views of a phantasmagoria, and London looked more grey and grim for the contrast. He grew to know the houses where these pictures gleamed, to know the members of the circles, to look for passing these each evening: it lessened distance, lightened the way. They looked so happy, the woman with a boy standing arm about her neck, the man with a girl at his knee, a proud smile sunning the face that had all day been care-worn and harassed,—so happy, it made the extreme gentility and cold decorum of Queen Street almost repelling. People did not have children in Queen Street, nor did they believe in any similar institution involving noise or merriment. Of course there were sons and daughters, but they were all grown up, and so far as Queen Street was

concerned always had been grown up. Catch a little one disturbing the neat arrangement of those geometric gardens! All the highly burnished knockers up and down the street would have risen and fallen with outraged protest. No hoops came trundling along its quiet pavement,—the very iron lids over the coal-cellars would have started up and opposed it. So decided, indeed, was the prejudice, the street might have been given over to a colony of decorous spinsters and bachelors. George did not like it, and sometimes would wander for relief round the infinitely less genteel streets; it was so real a pleasure to him to see the children, in their homes, or in the streets; no matter if wild and untidy as drawing-rooms go; he loved them with the genuine feeling which requires no first decking forth with bows and tuckers. And coming home as described night after night, his thought was ever with that project of his,—Why should they not have one such in that great ten-roomed house of theirs? It would do the carpets good, cheer the whole place, enliven that dull street. "Never do, George," said inner self. "It is not as though you were in a house of your own; and Aunt Percival is a curious body to introduce anything of the sort to! And dear Gabrielle?" Well, Gabrielle would give that placid, calm assent of hers, just to please himself; but he would ever feel restraint, knowing the thoughtful eyes were upon every movement, the ears pained by every word addressed endearingly to another, although but a child. "The fact is," said George to himself, "a man is placed in a very equivocal position, situated as I am. I do not want to hurt Gabrielle's feelings, for she is a dear, good girl, and I should be sorry to run counter to my estimable uncle and aunt; but I certainly wish I either had some little friend who could run in of an evening and make the place *human*, or else that I knew some fellow who would ask me to spend the evening sometimes with his family; but all the men I know are either unmarried or haven't any family. I declare I feel sometimes as though I could make friends with a bricklayer, and drink tea out of an old brown tea-pot, for the sake of feeling a little sociable and informal, rough and ready with his little ones!"

It was all very nice going home regularly to a tick of the clock, being let in by Gabrielle, with undeviating punctuality and with a smile that, meet smile or no, was always there to receive him, fair as some angel greeting; all very nice finding slippers and dressing-gown ready placed with his easy chair to a turn of the scroll on the carpet; very nice to have Gabrielle bring her quiet work every evening and sit silent while he wrote, yet so often looking up at the face bent over the writing; so nice, and uniform, and uneventful, so still, and tranquil, with its unromantic routine, he slightly wearied of it, and rather longed for change, yet would have asked no change but the one he would most have welcomed, the introduction of that most perfect antidote to the uniform—childhood! Besides, it is a slightly embarrassing feeling, to be ever in the company of so divine a character as was that of Gabrielle, consciously far from her equal in point of merit, of sincerity, of emotional affection; feeling to be placed in a false position, and to be altogether at a disadvantage, since expected every evening to declare a profession of love than which nothing was farther from immediate intention; a peculiarly embarrassing feeling to know one is looked upon as a son-in-law without experiencing that innate delight which is natural under the circumstances. George Percival probably loved Gabrielle as much as he had ever loved any one in his life, perhaps more; yet the very fact of always having been her companion (which caused the love Gabrielle experienced for himself to be so fine a sentiment, so firm a passion, so deep, so true), was of itself sufficient to counteract the germ of love which thrives best upon novelty.

He went home one evening—one of those October evenings—feeling chill and depressed, as the finer natures are very apt to feel when nearing that trying month, November.

Gabrielle received him as usual, took his hat and coat and umbrella, and then, throwing open the door of his room, disclosed a bright fire, his chair wheeled from the window to its side, table and draught-board just by, a book he was reading, the evening paper, and his slippers leaning against the fender before the fire.

"Well, this is something like!" Rubbing his hands, reviving on the instant, and of course marching over to the hearthrug and taking up his position back to the fire.

"I fancied you felt a little dull, dear, last evening; the fire is cheering!"

"Yes, very cheering!" He was thinking of those interiors: then conscience smote him; he went up to her and taking her hands looked gratefully into the clear eyes: "and my Gabrielle is a good, kind, thoughtful one, considerate as ever!"

She was so pleased by even that admission: a pleasant praise it was to her, even as though Heaven-sent, and to compensate her for long waiting.

"Uncle and aunt gone out?"

"Yes, they have gone to the Poppets to tea and supper; so, Mr. George, we've a long evening before us, if you are disposed to talk, or read me some more of the manuscript."

And after he had partaken of his usual tea-dinner, and they were seated by the fire, George leaning back in the easy chair, toes close to the bars, and looking so very unlike reading, Gabrielle felt quite a little flutter as she thought, "*He is going to talk!*" After settling thus, and evidently, from the intent look at the burning coals, with something upon his mind, there were a few minutes' pause, Gabrielle at her calm and methodical plain work for some poor pensioner, yet inwardly agitated and thrilled by expectancy, and thinking, "*There is nothing like a fire for inspiring a man with remembrance of the domestic!*" A pause that was broken by a sigh from the recesses of the easy-chair; and from over the work it was answered by a little faint apology for another—quite faint and indistinct, as scarce venturing to lift its bold facsimile, the fair echoist thinking, "*Surely sighs prelude confession!*" And after that the man in the chair sighed back, louder than hers yet lower than his first, and fidgeted, drew the chair closer to the fire—and, consequently closer to her upon the opposite side, so that she thought while sewing the gusset deftly, "*I am sure drawing up a chair denotes something out of the ordinary!*" And she ventured to peep up at him. He didn't look over-pleasant, but

no matter, it was like the maiden speech; and everybody knows the anxiety that is to a man.

She was full of tolerance, not in the least impatient. She had been waiting since sixteen, and knew it would come some time or other. "*These authors,*" she thought, "*are not like other mortals, but when they love, they love!*" Then suddenly she was all vivid attention, for he knocked over the fire-irons, and that would certainly awaken him to the existence of the audience, if anything would. Yes, he was about to speak; and trembling a little with soft delicious emotion, which she could barely credit—remembering it was past thirty by the time of life,—she heard, "I've a little something I have been waiting the opportunity of telling you, Gabrielle, which may as well be told now; indeed I shall seek to enlist your sympathy, ay, and I hope, win your co-operation!"

She nodded kindly, looking very interested, but in her heart thinking it a queer commencement, and, with the rapidity of thought one exercises at such times, running the gauntlet of connective probabilities. It was something he had been waiting the opportunity of telling her; that looked in her favour, very much in her favour! But then the seeking to enlist her sympathy—was that usual? Well, of course, her sympathy would be enlisted; it was only one of George's figurative modes of speech. But that "co-operation"—detestable word that. Gabrielle did not half like it; she waited, however, and the lover-cousin spoke again.

"I met with a little adventure, dear Gabrielle, when at home, this year, upon my holiday, which I have never told you of. I was impressively entreated not to speak of it if I could any way avoid doing so, and I entertained such reluctance to thus making it a matter of conversation, I *have* avoided doing so."

"Yes, dear!"

It was said with perfect quietness, but there was the feeling he might, at least, have told her. There was mention of that holiday, since when he had never been quite the same to her, and it turned her cold; there seemed after all some little mistake about this talk.

"You remember our favourite walk along that tributary of the Lea, which flows at the foot of the old Priory grounds?"

"Yes, dear!"

It was very trying having it thus recalled; she remembered but too well; for when boy and girl they had chased dragonflies upon the banks of the streamlet, and plaited rushes while sitting upon the grass, he telling her tales, composed with due regard to the dramatic, dear to childhood. The allusion to the Priory itself, the quaint, picturesque old ruin, beneath the shade of which so many long drowsy afternoons had fled, was well-nigh sufficient to fill her eyes with tears. However it was "Yes, dear!" It was always "Yes, dear!" with gentle Gabrielle.

"You are not to expect anything romantic, you know, merely the relating of an opportune service it was placed in my power to perform!"

What a long time it seemed coming; she could have jumped up and caught the words, they seemed so slow in rising to the lips. How quiet it was without!—Not a sound, for half Queen Street went to bed at seven o'clock, and the other half crept along the pavement and in at the richly-grained doors, silent as mice.

"It was near by the bridge you used to be so fond of standing upon; perhaps, because of this, I was tempted to lean over and look down into the water."

How pleased she felt at that. "*Dear old fellow!*" she said to herself, looking up wistfully; it takes so much to satisfy one.

"It was late in the evening; I think almost near to starlight: that hushed season we used to love so well!"

It was awfully tantalizing! Was he trying to enlist her sympathy by reviving old slumbering joys, or was there no second thought at all?

"I had not been feeling very well all day—I think—no, I am sure, I had not! Hence my taking that quiet and unfrequented walk at that hour!"

She did not very much want to hear all this preliminary, and wished he would come to it at once, whatever it was. If

there was one thing Gabrielle disliked more than another, it was beating about the bush. Cousin George poked the fire.

"I remember it was a most beautiful evening; I can almost hear those grasshoppers now!"

She gave a little tug at the calico; nay, the veriest pull, as testing the texture.

"And I walked thoughtfully on to that bridge."

Gabrielle thought this a suspension bridge. She rose and walked thoughtfully to the door, to let the cat in; it jumped upon George's knee, and began to purr fondly; it was so much in Gabrielle's confidence it could scarcely do otherwise. What a peaceful scene it was; how like to man and wife, and cat, especially the latter, if the proverbial instability be correct!

"—When I heard a cry, a child's cry of alarm, then a scream for help! I dashed to the spot from whence it proceeded, and found a girl struggling in the water. I at once brought her out of the unpleasant, if not dangerous predicament, and, bending over her, asked how she came there? By the light still lingering, I saw the little face lifted to my own, one of the most winning and lovable I had ever seen."

Gabrielle's hands were lying perfectly motionless upon the work; she was not surprised, or absorbingly interested, or foolishly jealous, but she was impressed by the coincidence of the striking resemblance to her dream.

"She told me that, as she was stooping to cup some water in the joined hollows of her hands, the soft bank gave way, and she fell headlong into the water; she said she was more frightened than hurt, and I am sure was as much hurt as she was frightened; but more than either was her eagerness to get away from me. My curiosity was aroused, for she seemed no ordinary child; although the garments were such as the poor cottage children wear, there was a refinement and prettiness about the speech equal in every respect to such as might characterize a child of the upper classes. The loneliness of her situation quite moved me, and I begged she would explain it. There was manifest reluctance; but after a little, bursting into tears, she told me that herself and mother had been walking all day; her mother was very weak, and had taken

no food, and had been seized with faintness within the Priory. I could not leave them thus; the child's position seemed too desolate, and I remarked an exquisite tenderness in her manner of speaking of her mother."

"No," said Gabrielle, looking thoughtfully into the fire, "it would not have been right to leave them in so lonely a situation."

"I took the child's hand, and said I would accompany her to the ruins; but she firmly declined my so doing. No, her mother would recover soon, and they would continue their way. I told her I lived close by, and might be of service; I offered to go for any restoratives the lady might require; I placed our home at her disposal, if she would permit me to escort her to it, and my sympathy impressed the child. With a beautiful movement, she gave me her hand and conducted me to her mother. I found the lady suffering from complete prostration, and I believe she had but recently passed through some severe mental ordeal."

"Poor thing!" murmured Gabrielle.

"The light was too dim in the shadowy old place to detect the lady's appearance; but the voice that thanked me, of inexpressible sweetness, denoted one of gentle breeding, and I felt deeply interested in the fate of these unfortunates, who might, for all I knew, have been overwhelmed by some sad disaster. I offered my friendly aid in any way, and begged their acceptance of such homely hospitality as the farm afforded."

"You are always nobly generous."

George smiled gravely in acknowledgment of this kind compliment, and continued his narration.

"You will be much surprised when I tell you that the unfortunate lady I was happily enabled to succour was the widow of poor Mr. Lionel, and, having met with sad reverses, was hoping to obtain some engagement as companion in a select household, but first had dragged herself hither for one glance at the old home, not seen for twelve years; perhaps with the half-hope of seeing her guardian, from whom, as you know, she was severed by her marriage."

"Yes; how strange a circumstance! I little thought you

were going to tell me this! I remember both herself and Mr. Lionel well; so affable with every one, they were much beloved."

"By all the tenantry. With shrinking delicacy, she explained how averse she was to accepting my offer, yet how thankful she would feel for some such shelter for a time. I pressed it upon her, entreating that she would not hesitate to accept so slight a service, which would be opportune; for she was overcome by trouble, fasting, and fatigue, and totally unfitted to be out of doors. For her little girl's sake I begged she would pause no longer, and I reminded her how often Mr. Travers had befriended ourselves, and especially had used his interest and influence in procuring me the situation I at present hold."

"Yes; and she allowed you to see her to the farm?"

"She told me first how broken were her fortunes, how inadequate her power to return the kindness offered; upon which I would not hear a word, but tendered her my arm, begging she would lean upon me while I supported her to our house. She did so; and when we arrived there my dear mother, with her accustomed genial hospitality and tender thoughtfulness, at once bestirred herself to see to the invalid's comfort, putting her to bed there and then, and making her those tempting and nourishing dishes which seem native to a farm-house, but which dear mother improves upon with a nicety all her own. And now tell me, Oh, fairest of fair judges! Did I well?"

Thus abruptly and flatteringly denominated critic, Gabrielle did not pause in her reply.

"Most certainly you did; I should have done the same."

"Thanks, dear; I am sure you would."

"I had no idea you were so well occupied all the time. I dreamt you were idling away the hours in those delicious meadows, or in the garden with your book, indolent as the honey-laden bees."

Spite of the pleasant words, there was a vein of sadness, and he looked at the face narrowly while asking,—

"And my Gabrielle is not the least little bit jealous?"

"Not the least little bit!"—the face with the honest eyes meeting his, and the lips pressed firm below.

"The lady in whom we were so interested remained at our house a fortnight, winning our sincere respect—so gentle, so thankful for every little service, it was a real pleasure having her about us—and she picked up wonderfully, seeming to regain strength by our very kindness. And how shall I describe her child to you? The counterpart of her beautiful mother, with a passionate love, an exquisite tenderness, in all her relations with that idolized parent. Mrs. Travers and myself had many quiet conversations together, about her little one, and she told me of traits so delicate, my love for children has increased tenfold."

"I am sorry for it."

He looked up surprised, and she explained.

"I am afraid you will one day become too fond of these little friends of yours, dear George! Believe me, I but speak in your own interest; it is so easy to centre the full love of a heart upon some object, especially if it appears to return that love; but it is another matter possessing the power of withdrawing the love at will. I mean in the event of that return love changing; and childhood is fickle, veering with the wind, and loving most where gaining most, and often only so long as that gain continues."

"It is seldom my gentle cousin expresses herself so warmly."

"It is because I hope never to see your happiness dependent upon anything so uncertain, and because, knowing you better than any living person knows you, I am aware how soon one of these would twine about your heart, and how soon that heart would feel the slightest change—a change certain to ensue. Do you think me bold? How often have I talked in confidence, and never once but with the highest regard for your welfare!"

"I know it, Gabrielle. You may be sure I would not have taken you into confidence now unless I were well assured of your pure unselfishness. I admit it would give me sincere pleasure to have Mrs. Travers's little girl here with us, for, as you have probably surmised, she is now an inmate of my

mother's home; hence my disinclination to advise the going thither of your young friend. I was unwilling to increase the pressure upon their kindness, since it is to oblige myself they have her there, and I was also unwilling the children should be thrown together."

Gabrielle was about to say that, had he but told her in the beginning she could have made this right; but she remembered she had not told him of that one little matter relative to 'Walter's' disguise; so she said instead,—

"You have yet to tell me of Mrs. Travers, and how she came to allow her little girl to stay."

"It was a sore struggle. The poor lady was resolved upon obtaining some situation whereby to earn money; her intention was to take lodgings for her child somewhere near, so that she might see her occasionally—as often as practicable; but when I represented the peril to the child involved in the arrangement, as there certainly would have been, and submitted the advantages derivable from a quiet country home and pure country air, she admitted the justice of the plea, and saw with me it was more in the interest of her child's health to allow her to remain, even if deprived of the joy of so frequently seeing her."

"Yes," said Gabrielle thoughtfully, looking in the fire that snapped and crackled, as if enjoying some excellent, albeit vexing life-problem.

"And I offered to make this my business, if she would permit me, and to be at entire cost—not a very large one—of the maintenance of her little girl, at my own home or elsewhere, both myself and herself to see the child as often as convenient."

Gabrielle drew a deep breath.

"And this kind offer was of course accepted?"

"Yes, very gratefully; without any nonsense, and upon the understanding that any expenditure thus involved should be returned to me so soon as Mrs. Travers was in a position to do so."

"Well, it is a novel responsibility for you—one long wished for; I hope it may give you every pleasure!"

She did wish it, for his happiness was dearer to her than her own.

He smiled in a dissatisfied manner.

"It is but a half possession; the child is too fond of her mother to spare a grain of fondness for any one else, and were Mrs. Travers to become wealthy, her little girl would be removed from my care without compunction—"

"Of course, and very properly; and just as you were beginning to love the child; remember my warning. It is one of those pitfalls good people make for themselves."

What a flush the flaring blaze in the grate lent to the usually faint-hued cheeks!

"Hence I am acting very prudently, and as foreseeing all you would represent, in not going home, as I might do, say each Saturday afternoon."

"But how about the prudence, when wishing for the danger to enter this very house?"

"True, Gabrielle; a mere passing thought; a scarcely defined dream of what might be."

"But what is the utility of a realized 'might be' if destined inevitably to lead up to sharp and certain pain? Better live on the 'might be' for ever and for ever."

She was very serious now, and George Percival knew himself confronted by woman awake to hard and bitter truth, to the hardest and most bitter truth a woman learns, when discovering all a life's hopes are futile, all a love's life is dead. She did not exhibit her distress, nor convey by a single moan all the bitterness. She simply realized it, and accepted it.

"George, dear,"—he looked up, he had never in all his life heard her speak to him so softly,—"I am so glad you have told me of all this—I may be able to help you. Believe me, I will do my best to teach her *how* to love you."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A QUIET CHAT.

It was said with a sweetness that never varied, and a firmness leaving no second thought of its truth. And he was quite taken aback, being unprepared for this generous and unselfish interest.

There would, then, be something indeed to hurry home from the City for, and without envious glancing into those red-curtained rooms he passed upon the transit. *His* room should become exquisite by the light lent by that one small sunny face. And Queen Street, barren avenue, should blossom as the rose. For the first time in his life it would be a place of charms; so great was the transformation to be effected!

With Gabrielle for helper, what might not be done!

George had never particularly loved the street the worthy bookseller had retired to; its quietness was oppressive, for to him the Prophet Zechariah's description was dear: "*And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.*" George Percival was an eminently domestic and home-loving person, his evenings were spent at home, and it was his world. There had seemed to be something wanting, but he had hitherto been contented with those hazy idyllic dreamings which now appeared nearer the form and semblance of reality than ever before. Involuntarily his thought wandered in the direction of one of his clerks, a wholly inadequate creature to whom the manager had been very kind, for the simple reason (a sufficient one with George Percival) that he had a child dependent upon him; and, "I will try and have Andrew Wilson's salary raised for

this," he said to himself. In such odd manner does the gratitude of a heart find vent!

It was a painful satisfaction Gabrielle experienced upon that evening; her cousin looked so much happier, and she sadly thought, "Why had *I* not the power to brighten his life and kindle those beautiful smiles?" And then with a second thought came the consciousness that she had done so, and she was contented.

She turned the channel of their thought by handing him a book her father had, that morning, brought in. Mr. Percival, senior, making a point of obtaining through his old publishing friends the notable books of the day.

"What is this? 'The Triumph of Seasons,' by the Rev Westley Garland. I have read reviews upon it; opinion seems varied!"

"There need be no second opinion upon its merit!" said Gabrielle, with the generosity of a true woman.

"I will read it. I am an admirer of several of his works; and I have often thought if there was one man more than another I should like to know it is Westley Garland."

"Well, it is useless wishing any vain wish of the kind—I expect Mr. Garland is one of those stars whose beams reach us from the highest distance."

"I should place this work," said George, minutely looking through the volume, "amongst the author's poetical productions. Some prose works are not to be rated by the canons which govern prose."

"Like your own books, which are more distinctively poetic."

"I am no poet, nor do I wish to be; it signifies to suffer; my nature is susceptible enough without the higher strung discipline. When I have felt myself drifting thitherward I have rather checked the course, thinking it unfits me for the world of facts and figures; when I give myself to this it will be after quitting the arena of matter of fact. Even this hobby about little Ella partakes too much of the poetic, and, judging by all my past experience, I shall be called to account in some rough form. I always find something to dispel illusions: and

I never yet yielded to an affection for a particular child but it was taken from me."

"Not a very encouraging retrospect, just entering upon your experiment; be careful! I do not, however, see why to enjoy the poetic should represent 'to suffer.'"

"Plant an æolian harp upon a hill in gusty March, and note the effect upon that sensitive instrument. Truly, the poet thinks, studies, writes for the future, and lives for others rather than himself. If conscientious, he is the most unselfish worker in the world. Prosperity may come or go, it has no bearing upon his work; the bias of opinion in no degree affects the execution of that upon which he expends his soul. He may be unrecognized, unknown for years, and then his audience may be the scantiest ever grouped to hear a singer, but he will sing on, in the dark, it may be, but very sweetly, and with that earnest faith and simple affection which soul-work ever imparts to the steadfast in heart."

She had ceased to work, and was looking upon his face, listening eagerly.

"The soul of the man or woman constituted poetically is by the fineness of organization peculiarly susceptible to mental enthusiasm, and all the emotional influences thrilling the heart with ecstasy; it is, as it were, stretched to greatest tension upon bars of music, rendering it dangerously sensitive to impressions which may at any moment shake fragile beings like reeds."

"Beauty for instance?"

"There are times when beauty itself becomes a snare, and idealism a decoy to evil. With the laudable desire to win good opinions on one side, and to maintain an independent judgment on the other, it is no easy matter to avoid becoming rather the idealist of the flesh than of the spirit. Yet, as we know, in our own day this has been accomplished by more than one poet; by aid of their faith, in virtue of a devotion that never wavers—the faith, say, a severe reverence for the antique, the devotion, an intense love of the Greek; a belief persistently followed all through, a creed strengthened by years, the wider their sympathy with the classical."

"You treat the classical with becoming honour!"

"It is the mother of culture."

"And you would go into raptures, I suppose, before one of the marbles of Athens?"

"Not at all. I prefer some pretty child of to-day, in whom I discover more perfection of beauty. It is rather her learning I allude to."

"And taste."

"Yes, and taste; in comparison with which the quintessence of Modernism is dissatisfying."

"And you hold those poets to be the most perfect, who approach nearest to the spirit of the Greek?"

"The most perfect upon purely finished style and august elegance, not upon those grounds affecting our common humanity. One of these poets is no use to me for lifting my trouble-laden soul, or pointing out the direction where comfort is to be found. I shall gather more from some few sentences of some writer intensely human,—say, for instance, our friend Mr. Garland here,—than from a whole epic of the Attic school. But I shall there learn a sublimity of thought which will confer innate nobility, by reason that it is the very highest form of scholarship." He paused, but she did not reply, and he proceeded with the argument. "These poets recognize no bridge between the Present and the Attic, the periods are identical; if departure occurs in particular cases, under stress of illustration, it is to be in the company of at once the most perfect and the most beautiful of the masters of thought. The secret of their finished power is sympathy, as it is the secret of every true poet; in this case sympathy with the classical. Sympathy appears to me the essence of sublimity, both in music and poetry. The measure of poetry is its depth—depth of emotion, not meaning; when it beats with a heart, breathes with a life, throbs with the tenderness of a soul: this is the emotional depth of poetry: by this, with this, for this, it lives and loves and suffers; pines through long waste of years; droops, sun-scorched and wind-blown, hidden in the valley; waits hopefully the issue of a hundred days of doubt, ofttimes faints low even to the border-land, but never dies; for its

vitality is established upon the basis which gives vitality to the soul, and the soul becomes poetry, and poetry becomes soul, and the soul cannot die!"

Yes, she understood all this, and the gleaming light upon her face was its witness; she thought the words might almost have proceeded from her own lips.

"The abstract," he continued, "should have no abiding-place in poetry; it is an utterance in no case submitting to strained effect; for is it not the language of music which suffers by contraction, the melody sinking to broken shreds of unlovely sound,—intense, yet void of sympathy? It exalts as god the Intellect, and the heart may but kiss its skirts, banished to the utter confines of the circle where Mind preaches in the midst. Yet even as there is more of prose in this day of work than of poem-feeling, or tenderness of instinct, so many find comfort in the letter who fail to find the love. Some are so ground down by care and voiced to common tones of daily life, the poet's message is one of discordance in place of sweetness, and the exquisiteness of high metrical emotion is a trouble, and is apprehensively shunned. To such the light of the lofty purpose is lost, and the inner mission is negative; they count his days spent in folly, and good strength wasted upon shadows. But the man sings on, not regarding the heedless. What bird stays the wild wood-land trill because there are few or none to listen? It cannot help but sing: and little it knows of wanderers pausing by reason of the spell of its song, which lifts the heart upward, cheers the step forward, reveals glimpses of a bright beyond, and sends them on their way stronger and with a braver courage. I do assure you often, when terribly low, I have revived under some such influence; and when ground down utterly, as it seemed, and altogether oppressed by the routine of City work, some fragment of this higher language has lifted my soul from dead and colourless grooves."

"I am sure of it. Sometimes I have wondered how it is you can keep at it day by day with the punctuality and regularity of mere mechanical clerkship?"

"Why do hundreds, who feel as I do, and who abhor the

grinding blankness of the life? It is for the money earned, the position gained; it is because respectability requires a man to possess some tangible proof representing some certain source of income, and because a man without it is but three removes from a vagabond—by the focus of respectability! What do you think I should be worth in the estimation of genteel folk, supposing I lost my position at the Bank? Very little, I trow!"

"Well, we won't talk about that!"

"No, we won't talk about that, although I have sometimes felt that if a sixteenth of my present salary was derivable from literature it would be ten times as sweet."

"And yet your position is an honourable and an honoured one, and you have worked hard to make it so! Listen! There is the postman. He is coming here!"

The maid entered with a black-edged note for George, which he read aloud, as follows:—

My dear Friend,

I have been unable to write you before, owing, I am sorry to say, to the bustle of preparation for leaving home. Immediately upon my arrival, I discovered it was as an occasional travelling companion my services would be required. I do not feel justified in resigning the position I hold, since every member of the family treats me with extreme kindness and consideration. It is, nevertheless, a grief to me (thus being compelled to quit England) on account of my dear little one; but I have at least the consolation of knowing she could not be in kinder hands; and as I would commend her to the thoughtful protection of a father, I leave her in your charge, praying God may bless and reward you for all your kind sympathy and care. This is merely a visit of a week or two by the Misses Vivian to their Mamma, now resident in Nice; thus I am hoping my absence may be of very short duration. Meanwhile, believe me, with very grateful recollections,

Your friend,

Ella Travers.

CHAPTER XLV.

IN THE BANK PARLOUR.

ANDREW WILSON, the clerk of whom mention has been made, knew perfectly well how much he was indebted to the manager, and daily trembled lest the errors he made by the score should be discovered by somebody else. Of a truth, the discrepancies and inaccuracies of his factotum took up a considerable portion of Mr. Percival's time. Not wishing it to be known that he connived at so inadequate a system of service, he used to go carefully through Wilson's work after the gentlemen of the Bank had left the establishment. The Manager knew to a certainty that his clerk would never obtain another similar position; hence his patience. And he was marvellously tolerant with the poor old scribe.

He was sitting late one evening, in the Bank-parlour, checking Andrew Wilson's figures, when Mr. Stephen Miles stealthily returned, in company with Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., one of the directors. This gentleman had once published a book, which had been a distinguished failure; he, therefore, entertained unmitigated contempt for this mere salaried Manager, who dared to bring out successful books under the very nose of himself, autocrat of the London and Olympian. Stephen Miles, with unerring scent, detecting a hitch somewhere, improved upon it, and by crafty and subtle device fanned the fire of the director's jealous annoyance. And Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., lent but too ready an ear to the poison-whispering, and bided his time. Stephen Miles, who aspired to the Managership, lost no opportunity, when alone with his superior, of disparaging Percival and his attainments.

He was (not that it was any business of his) abstracted at the work, evidently engaging in his duties mechanically, and not with due regard to the interests of the firm. "A man cannot serve two masters," said Stephen devoutly, as implying that the master Mr. Percival served was decidedly not Mammon. He was sorry to allude to such a thing in Mr. Gripper's presence, for Percival had a mother (the lizard-green pocket-handkerchief here came into play), but he feared—and he had observed him very closely—he feared Mr. Percival was not the conscientious and high-principled young man the directors supposed. It grieved him more than words could convey to express this opinion of a superior, but integrity was everything with him, and he would not be true to his integrity if he kept it back any longer; he had passed many sleepless nights thinking this over since seeing some little things he did not quite like in Mr. Percival's transaction of the Bank business, and it was long before he could make up his mind to draw attention to this, knowing the confidence reposed in the Manager, and aware that such, coming from a subordinate, bore appearance of being dictated selfishly; but he deemed it his duty, his bounden duty, as a faithful servant, to direct Mr. Gripper's notice to this "something" which was making him so uncomfortable; and he had done so.

And the director gave this faithful servant his hard hand gratefully, with,—

"You have done the Bank good service, Mr. Miles; we will see into this!"

Thus encouraged, the faithful servant explained more particularly the nature of his doubts. He did not know, mind, but terribly feared all the accounts passing through Mr. Percival's hands were not quite accurate; he was in the habit of sitting at the books long after clerks and cashiers had left the premises—that looked bad! He (Mr. Miles) entertained strong distaste for the mysterious and underhanded; in business everything must be open and above board to please him, or he would have none of it. If Mr. Percival found the pressure of the work too heavy for transacting within the reasonable hours apportioned to business, there was no objection to his

working later, but at least he might have one of the juniors to assist him. It was the stealthiness—he was sorry to use the word, but couldn't think of another—that he did not like; he did so hold with actions being open to the inspection of all the world!

Mr. Gripper quite believed in Mr. Miles, but felt astonishingly discommoded when the awful roll of the eyes came into operation, and being himself a keen man of business, with particular regard to honesty of purpose, he quite commended the sentiments of this valued adviser; and when Mr. Miles proposed that he should take the Manager unawares one afternoon, and see what he really was up to, Mr. Gripper thought it his bounden duty to the London and Olympian to do so. And they did so. They came in quietly by means of a private key, and stood in the passage outside the first door of those doubling the entrance to the Bank-parlour. Mr. Miles was to keep in the background: he begged his name should not be brought into question, and the other agreed. Mr. Gripper entered softly, and confronted the Manager before he had time to blot the balance of an account he was examining, but this did not confuse the industrious accountant; far from it. He rose and bowed respectfully, waiting: he supposed this call to have reference to one of the Bank customers.

"At work late, Mr. Percival?" said the member of the firm, taking a seat, and folding the tails of his long coat over each knee as though to keep them warm.

"There is always something needs attention, sir, after closing. I prefer everything straight before locking up!"

"Thank you; very right!" He rose, standing over the book, glancing down like a hawk, his thumb on the page heavy as a government seal, and asked, "Anything wrong with this account?"—reckoning the whole thing in a flash, and observing it correct.

"Nothing, sir, I have rectified an error I detected, dated the 26th!"

Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., drew a chair up to the table and pulled the book over to him, remarking, "Money is down again, I see by the evening paper!"

"Indeed, sir!" The Manager did not take particular interest in the fluctuation, so long as his department displayed prosperity.

"What's this? Something erased here; clerical error presumably!"

The Manager looked. It was strange he had not noticed this before; it was not of his scratching out, and he had gone over the page only three evenings previously; signing it correct; his signature was there just below it; he could not understand it, and said so.

Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., held his head up very high, looked down the sharpness of his nose, turned over a page or two, and detected a place where figures had been substituted for others; he covered the page above and below the alteration with blotting paper, remarking carelessly upon the neatness with which the accounts were kept, then politely requested Mr. Percival would look at that page a moment. Were those his figures? To which George unhesitatingly answered, "Yes!" so close was the forgery.

"Have you found occasion for many alterations in the books, sir?"

"I have invariably done so where I have detected clerical errors on the part of the clerks!"

"Thank you, I am satisfied as to the punctilious circumspection exercised. If you will allow me, I will take this book home, and balance two or three of the accounts; I will explain to my partners in the morning!"

"Certainly, sir, if you wish it!" He tied the book up in brown paper, and offered to leave it at Mr. Gripper's house in the course of the evening.

"I will take it myself, I am obliged to you. Trying evening this, for any one queer about the chest!"

He was buttoning the ends of his muffler inside his thick brown coat, Mrs. Rehoboam Gripper being monstrously particular with this invaluable member of Society. As Mrs. Gripper observed to her eldest daughter, Miss Cornelia Gripper, "Your Papa is not only a private gentleman, my love, he is also a banker, and for the sake of those entrusting

"What's this? Something erased here."—Page 466.

their little all to his keeping, we should take the utmost precaution lest he catches cold." And they did so.

The Gripper household was conducted upon model principles of precaution. Mrs. Gripper was the daughter of a civil engineer, and the precautionary organs of the skilled constructor were fully developed in this careful lady. Mr. Gripper's precautionary measures took a different form, being closely allied with the preservation of treasure. Miss Gripper took upon herself the management of the establishment, and it was a continuous struggle with that estimable lady lest one or other of the servants transgressed wastefully. Miss Miranda Gripper, on the contrary (Miss Miranda was the second daughter), confined her cautiousness to foreign departments, such as the tradespeople, with whom they dealt; "a designing set," Miss Miranda said, "who would get the better of you, if they could;" she likewise displayed wariness with their friends and acquaintances at whose houses they visited, expressing habitual distrust regarding their genuineness and sincerity, and sometimes their solvency. Miss Lydia, the third daughter, displayed vigilance in respect to the opposite sex, fencing and hedging herself in from some ever impending attack, although the necessity was not imminent. Taken in its entirety, the household to which the buttoned-up and muffled banker proceeded, and conveyed the brown paper parcel under his arm, was an eminently precautionary one.

After Mr. Gripper had gone, the Manager, although untroubled because he knew the accounts to be balanced accurately, sat rather perplexed, musing over that particular alteration Mr. Gripper had pointed out, and which he could not remember at the time of his attestation. When could he have altered the particular figures there standing? And why should Mr. Gripper so carefully cover the page when asking him respecting them? Mr. Percival sat ruminating, hoping all was right, and but little disturbed by the occurrence. He experienced great sympathy for Andrew Wilson, who had seen better days. True, Mr. Percival knew, but did not acquaint others with his knowledge, that the old gentleman, who was a skilled performer upon the violin,

had served in the orchestra of a theatre; but this was preferable to many of the shifts the needy resort to, George thought, and should certainly not debar him from obtaining some higher form of employment. The day the musician came before the Manager in this same parlour, he told that kind-hearted humanitarian the story of his past, and it was a story of superior fortunes and of education, as well as of sorrow and wrong, and Percival gave him his hand, with the promise to do his best to assist him. And he kept his promise. He believed the clerk, if he once got into the way required, would prove more valuable than some of the younger men with considerable jewellery and large assurance. And rather than the meek and grateful fellow should be ignominiously discharged, he would continue rectifying his mistakes, questionable though the policy might be. But he could not somehow remember Wilson having made a mistake at the particular line Mr. Gripper had pointed out, and he was puzzled; not in the least troubled, but decidedly puzzled. Amidst his ruminating there came a tap at the door, a gentle tap that only small hands make, and, with a pleased smile, the gentleman bade the intruder enter. It was merely the daughter of the Bank housekeeper, but she came in with an evident purpose. Mr. Percival had been kind to the child, and even as he won love of all such, the little girl remembered him, when absent, more fondly than he suspected. But now she came in to say this to him, and it set him thinking,—

"I thought, perhaps, you did not know, sir, that Mr. Miles came in with Mr. Gripper; they came in very softly and stood whispering in the passage. I was on the stairs."

"Thank you, my child, it is all right, no doubt Mr. Miles returned for something he had forgotten."

"He has often been back before, sir; just asked if you were here, and gone away again."

"Oh, Miles is a good fellow enough; I have no doubt there was some cause for his return."

He had broken bread with the man; it was not easy for George Percival to entertain distrust; he was not of the order of those who distrust all with whom they break bread.

"Mother doesn't believe in Mr. Miles!" replied the child, with simplicity; not stopping to think that it was really no business of her mother's. Intent upon speaking her thoughts truthfully, she had honestly expressed her opinion in the earnestness of her interest.

And when she had gone, and George had locked up, and turned into the chilly street, he felt a dim mysterious presentiment not to be accounted for, not to be reasoned away, which visiting some, produces discomfort and depression.

"Now," said George to himself, "I ought not to be feeling like this; I suppose it's the weather!" That poor weather, how it is saddled with grievances, all the year round! And as, when he felt one of his low moods creeping upon him, he always thought enviously of those with a family to take it off, so now his mind pictured little Ella watching his mother knitting beside the huge fireplace in the parlour at the farm, pictured his father with the evening pipe and the county paper, often laying aside his glasses to look at the fairy picture beside him; Wallace, George's old hound, which he could not keep in town, would be asleep before the fire, and Ella would often stoop to fondle her shaggy friend. A mere country picture, but it was very sweet to him upon that chilly and uncomfortable evening, for there was home, his mother, and a child, and George Percival could not realize any combination more exquisite than that. And he was delighting himself with this fancy when—he found himself face to face with a tall, thin being who, turning the corner with the expedition of a harlequin, was brought to a standstill by this thoughtful man plodding homeward.

"Bless my soul—opposite neighbour—happy to cross paths with you, sir—charming evening—pressed for time now, but we shall meet again. Adieu!" And like harlequin still, an unearthly, cadaverous, sardonic sort of harlequin, he flitted down the street.

CHAPTER XLVI.

DISMISSED!

"THUS, gentlemen, there is evident defalcation; but I am sure I re-echo the sentiments of my esteemed partners in saying we do *not* wish to press a criminal prosecution; that we shall combine mercy with justice in simply dismissing George Percival without a character. We are displaying a leniency he has little right to expect, but which, as Directors of the London and Olympian, we feel we can afford to exercise!"

Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., was speaking at an extraordinary meeting of the Directors, convened to consider the case of Percival, Manager, detected, it was said, in tampering with the books for fraudulent purposes. Gripper, Esq., made out his case so convincingly to his partners, that, with all their faith in and respect for George, they were staggered. Yet not one of them but pitied him. Gripper, Esq., knew this very well, knew his partners would never assent to a prosecution in a criminal court; and hence his magnanimous flourish of mercy.

The assembly was met in the long room used by the firm above the Bank, to consider how they ought to act, and the senior partner rose to reply. It was a white-haired old gentleman of benevolent features and mildly authoritative manners, who evidently felt keenly the unfortunate position in which their *employé* had placed himself.

"Our friend Mr. Gripper very reasonably sets forth the unpleasant nature of this distressing occurrence. I have been so long connected with the Bank, indeed, I may say almost from its foundation, and in all that period, I am happy to say,

we have had no dishonest clerk. This altogether exceptional affair is therefore most painful, and I am exceedingly shocked the London and Olympian should have been subjected to this sort of thing, so particularly careful as we have always been in our selection of the gentlemen in our employ, and so exacting in the matter of their introductory references, testimonials, antecedents, and securities! I am grieved beyond measure that a young man like Mr. Percival—recommended to us by a gentleman of position, as we must certainly admit Mr. Beresford Travers to be—should have thus forgotten the obligations due to Society, to his patron, and to us!"

The speaker paused, his partners looking grieved, while the susceptible Gripper, Esq., appeared much affected. The senior partner resumed,—

"You will allow me to say I commend the charitable course our friend Mr. Gripper kindly proposes; dismissal is imperative, since our confidence is abused, and in justice to other firms we cannot, I am sorry to say, permit George Percival to leave our service with—with a character, that is—of course I mean—with the—with the character of an honest and truthful young man."

The old gentleman was very flustered; this was an embarrassing and distasteful office, and he had spoken with candour when saying, that, as the senior partner in the London and Olympian, he was much shocked.

Another partner, with some hesitation, ventured an opinion; he thought Mr. Percival should be allowed an opportunity of clearing himself.

A third partner thought it most inconsistent to admit extenuation, by circumstance or influence, in so extreme a case, and he felt it incumbent upon him to endorse Mr. Gripper's motion, and to suggest summary dismissal; further, he was of opinion George Percival should think himself highly favoured at thus getting off scot-free.

A fourth discerned that, being the Manager: in such a very responsible position, the offence was all the more heinous, and he trusted Percival's half-year's salary due in December would not be admitted.

"But how is the poor fellow to live," asked the more benevolent senior partner, "deprived of his wage and destitute of references?"

"And how," replied the other, with a somewhat sarcastic query, "does Mr. Percival think Banks are to continue solvent if managers appropriate profits at discretion? Money is at this time the worst of all commodities by means of which to live, and if reduced by a system of illegitimate credit, it will be perfectly valueless. Have Percival in, hear what he has to say, and let it be settled one way or another, for I have an important engagement that must not be broken."

Percival was called in; he entered bowing respectfully, and looking more cheerful than he had for months. It was the morning following upon that memorable evening of the conversation with Gabrielle. He felt a little surprised at the gloomy looks around the board, and at the coldness which acknowledged his greeting, but beyond this he experienced no astonishment.

Upon the senior partner devolved the disagreeable office of addressing the culprit.

"Good morning, Mr. Percival; I have an unpleasant duty to perform, I assure you, but a necessary one, and in the interests of that rightful principle which it is our inherent duty as honest men and good Christians to observe, I must not shrink from its performance. It is my painful duty to inform you that our books have been tampered with, and there is serious defalcation in the accounts; we are so placed we can arrive at no other conclusion than that you have betrayed your trust, and we are compelled to charge you with embezzlement—"

"Good Heavens! Gentlemen, what is this? *You* charge *me* with *embezzlement!* I am dreaming, surely."

It was so emphatically the speech and the action of an innocent man, the dazed and bewildered look was so utter upon his ghastly face (for the shock was so intense, so unexpected), he might have relied upon this alone, without a word, had he but the senior partner to deal with; there were others, however, whose grim, stern aspect convinced him it was anything but a dream in their view.

Then the senior partner said, with a touch of kindness in his voice,—

"Cast your eye over these erasures and false additions, sir, and account for them; if you can do so, in some way different to that we have concluded, believe me, we shall be *very* glad."

But Mr. Percival stood upon his dignity; it was nothing that required casting the eye over the book for in his opinion; and he declined lending himself even to recognize their suspicion of himself.

"No, gentlemen," he replied sadly, yet composed now, "it is quite unnecessary; if you can lay this grave crime to my charge, it is so unjustifiable and unaccountable, I refuse to look at any writings in that book not my own—"

"But how can you tell whether they are your own or not if you don't look?"

"Because, sir, you but just now stated the additions to be false. Whenever I have erased any figures it has been for the purpose of making the accounts *accurate*."

In his heart the senior partner approved the argument, although experiencing surprise at the lofty stand-point taken by the accused, who, according to his old school of ethics, should have been prostrated and suing for mercy.

"You would not surely say, Mr. Percival, that any one else has been tampering with these entries?"

"I most certainly should, sir, if the entries have been tampered with, for of a truth it is not I who have to answer for that dastardly trick!"

"But only yourself and Mr. Gripper have had access to this ledger, which, as you know, is kept, or should be kept, with the account-books in the private safe."

"I will not say it is Mr. Gripper—I am more discriminate than yourselves in my charges against people; but I do most unhesitatingly say it is not I. There is evidently some most astonishing mistake in the whole affair."

"I should think so," muttered Mr. Gripper sourly.

"No mistake at all, Percival," said the fourth partner, who was in a hurry to be off, "the whole thing is extremely simple, and lies in a nutshell, an extremely tight nutshell, I think you

will find. Figures in our books have been altered, detection of which arousing our suspicions—not of you, but of something being wrong—we examine the accounts, and we find the altered figures show a deficiency of 400*l*. Yourself being alone empowered to touch either these books or the private cash, we can come to no other conclusion than that you have heard, which, instead of disproving, you refute with well-assumed indignation; which, I am sorry to say, is less straightforward than open and manly confession."

Mr. Percival brought his hand down heavily upon the table, and stood face to face with the board, at bay, strong and reliant in his honesty.

"Would you have me confess to a thing my whole soul would revolt at, and the mention of which is loathsome? No, sirs! Had I the cur-like infamy to act as I have been charged, I could most certainly confess or do any mortal thing; but never so long as I am clear to myself and to my God. As to my fellow-man, that, upon second thought, is of little moment."

Mr. Gripper rose: he wore so strangely kind and plausible an aspect, it appeared as though he was about to use some representation in favour of a more charitable course. No, Mr. Gripper simply put a question or two.

"We will credit your appreciation of truth, Percival, and perhaps you will inform the meeting what may be the qualities of the clerk named Andrew Wilson?"

"The question is scarcely definite enough, sir; may I ask if you mean as regards *character* or business qualifications!"

"I said clerk, sir, which, of course, means business!" answered the antagonist surlily, nettled by the other's coolness.

"Andrew Wilson is not so quick or correct as a younger man would be, but he is thoroughly conscientious, and works with willingness to the best of his ability; remember he is only paid half what the juniors are getting!"

"Nothing to do with it, the London and Olympian is not a refuge for superannuated clerks; we require men we can depend upon, and men we can trust!"

"Precisely!" remarked a director at one of the corners, but

as he was cross-eyed, it was impossible to tell which way he was looking, and the speaker even was matter of doubt.

"Will you tell us," continued Mr. Gripper, "whether you have, or whether you have not, systematically aided this man, Andrew Wilson, at blundering over his work?"

"Again I do not understand your question!"

"Have you not, upon more than one occasion, saved this man from the just desert now about to befall yourself—dismissal from the firm? A man whose only value in the world, so far as I can ascertain, seems to be a taste or talent for violin-playing; a pretty qualification, truly, for a Bank! I should like to know what business he had to be taken on?"

"That, sir (when I had the pleasure of serving you as Manager), was distinctly my business! I took Mr. Wilson on because he is an educated man, and to a large extent competent to carry out the duties required. He has known great sorrows, but has preserved his respectability; he was eager for a situation of the kind, and I gave him the trial; I was very pleased with his gentlemanly bearing, his simple endeavours to give satisfaction, his persevering efforts, and his uniform integrity, and I kept him on, convinced he would in time succeed in doing work that would bear comparison with the best. I may be permitted to hope you will not turn him off through any misunderstanding with myself!"

In reply, Mr. Gripper looked round the faces at the table, and, reading approval, touched a gong.

"It will be more satisfactory, a great deal, if you take your friend along with you; there will thus be opportunity for your continuing your partnership."

"Mr. Gripper," interrupted the senior partner, mildly, "I think it is unnecessary to indulge in any more of these reproaches!"

"Certainly, sir!" and Gripper, Esq., bowed jerkily.

The Bank page appeared. "Send Mr. Wilson up!" And Gripper, Esq., looked thoughtful, for there was a light in George Percival's eyes he did not like.

"If he meets me in the lane by my house, one of these

winter nights, ten to one but he punches my head, garrotes me, or some fine thing or other; I must be careful!"

Like all bullies, Gripper, Esq., was an arrant coward.

The page opened the door, and Andrew Wilson walked in. He looked pale; the unfortunate soon perceive a change. There was an air of sober broken-down gentility about the man; they had not observed it before, but now, while he stood trembling there before them, while they curiously examined the individual Percival had so chivalrously protected, they did notice a something that bespoke refinement. Although, thanks to his good friend, many degrees higher in the social scale than when dependent upon the orchestral work of the theatre, he yet presented a decidedly needy appearance.

Rehoboam Gripper, Esq., cleared his throat and looked aslant at the quivering, trembling old man.

"Good morning, Andrew Wilson! We have sent for you under unpleasant circumstances; not being satisfied with the performance of your duties. Be good enough to make out your account up to twelve o'clock, and hand it to the cashier."

The old man's head drooped; he leaned heavily on the back of a chair; he could not say anything. This grim gathering of monied men, who could take on and dismiss whole hosts like himself, overawed him; he felt unable to utter a simple word in reply. He heard a quick footstep, knew a manly tread was approaching him, felt his hand grasped cordially, and, looking up, saw through a mist as it were, the kind face, even as the face of a son; that, next to his child, was dearer than all else.

"Never mind, old friend, I will not lose sight of you!"

"Just what I said," Mr. Gripper intruded; "tarred with the same brush, they'll stick together, but next time won't get off quite so easily, I'll be bound!"

"Will—you—explain—your—meaning, sir?" asked George Percival indignantly.

"Yes, I will, sir!" answered the other, with aggravating asperity. "It is that the next employers you rob will send you to gaol without sitting half an hour under your impudence!"

"Hear! hear!" From the man who was in a hurry to be off.

George bit his lip. The control displayed throughout the

interview bore witness to the fine Saxon character. It was the man who had been all trembling and crushed who was galvanized to life and energy by the insults heaped upon his friend.

"A lie!" he burst out; "a black and monstrous lie!"

"Mercy on us!" cried the old gentleman, in a plaintive shrill little voice, "A scene, a quarrel, in the Bank board-room! Gentlemen, I rise to order!" And, much scandalized, the senior partner of the London and Olympian rose, holding a hand up with deprecatory appeal; it presented a white palm which served for flag of truce; hostilities ceased, and there was a calm; following upon which Mr. Percival courteously spoke,—

"I think this unpleasant discussion need not be prolonged, gentlemen, it does not seem as though it would lead to an understanding. I have a balance of 425*l.* to my account with the Bank. I will, if you please, draw 25*l.*, and leave the 400*l.*, the amount laid to my charge as deducted from the private treasury, until this mystery is cleared up. I have no doubt but that I shall receive it before long, but failing your ever being perfectly satisfied as to my innocence, I will forfeit the amount altogether."

The senior partner bowed. "I think it but right, Mr. Percival, to say that we have been talking it over, and feel we cannot give a testimonial as to your trustworthiness, and my telling you this now will spare the annoyance of a refusal!"

"I should not so far forget myself, sir, as to refer any firm to one that had used me as you have done!" And without more ado, bowing coldly, Percival opened the door, held it with kind attention until Andrew Wilson walked through, and then went out, closing it softly behind him.

"Cheeky!" muttered the man who was in a hurry to be off, to Gripper, Esq. "And I should think a good clear out!"

Mr. Gripper then rose, and, waiting until the hum of conversation had subsided, said, "I rise to propose, gentlemen, that Mr. Stephen Miles be appointed Manager, in the place of George Percival, dismissed. We have had convincing proof of his usefulness and merit as a servant of the Bank, of his skilled proficiency as a chief clerk, and of his probity and rectitude. I think we could not make a wiser choice; I am sure the

affairs of the Bank will prosper in the hands of Mr. Miles! Of course this is merely a suggestion; you, gentlemen, may be able to propose some one more adapted for this responsible post. I shall be happy to hear of a more eligible nominee, but at present I cannot see clearly where you will discover this. Perhaps our respected chairman will inform us what he thinks about it?"

"Whenever I have observed Mr. Miles," answered the senior partner cautiously, "he has appeared diligent in fulfilling his duties. I am not prepared to signify any gentleman whom I would appoint in preference."

"Very true!" from the man in a hurry to be off, whose legs were getting into a very restive condition under the board-room table.

"Let Mr. Miles be called," said the senior partner, and the gong was again sounded, to the surprise of the worthy housekeeper, wondering what on earth was the matter with the Bank. Mr. Miles was talking with George Percival. One by one the late Manager had been round, shaking hands and saying 'good-bye' to each; he volunteered no explanation, indeed was too affected, for he had been connected with the Bank for years, and the sorrow, the heart-felt sorrow manifested by one and all moved him extremely. The effect of George's communication, that he was going to leave, and for good, created a sort of panic, so great was the surprise, so ominous the significance, for each knew there would be never another manager like Mr. Percival, with whom each had felt safe so long as he did his duty; a feeling not always attendant upon duty when there is an uncertain helmsman. And last George came up to the head clerk, writing assiduously, with the methodical, regular precision which never varied; a pattern correspondent and accountant, sedulous and unremitting, but with the most astonishing roll to the eyes ever witnessed; this roll was at its most electric when his late superior arrived at the chief desk.

"Come to say good-bye, Miles; going to change my quarters."

"Whatever *do* you mean, Mr. Percival?" Insinuating his

pen through the indistinct-hued hair, and lodging it somewhere on the ear. "Not going to leave, sir, I hope?" He had turned partly round and was leaning an elbow on the desk.

"Yes, going to leave!"

"No misunderstanding, I trust, sir?"

"Yes, a very serious misunderstanding: by which my veracity, my honour, my honesty, my character, and my reputation are all jeopardized!" George spoke warmly; he felt warmly; he had made a sort of friend of this man, in a business sense, and in the courteous manner usual with heads of departments; thus he could speak more unreservedly.

"Goodness! But you alarm me!" said the other, in a low voice. "Do explain, perhaps I can do something for you, recommend some plan."

George shook his head sadly.

"I fear not! It is about the most mysterious occurrence that has ever come under my notice, and I am sorry enough to be the victim of it; but if the firm hasn't more faith than I have seen to-day we are certainly best apart, for I cannot work under a cloud. I must have all clear as the day, and candid as truth, or I am uncomfortable,—so it is as well!"

George proceeded to explain particulars in a few hurried words, and sympathy or emotion caused Mr. Miles's supernatural organs of vision to revolve to a phenomenal degree. Removing the lizard-green pocket-handkerchief from an inner cavity, he passed this with mournful meaning over brow and eyes; he evidently felt very much the painful position in which Mr. Percival was placed, and with tremulous solicitude he murmured, "I am thinking of your poor dear mother!"

George saddened on the instant. All had been so unlooked for, so cruelly abrupt, he had not thought of relations as yet; but it now flashed upon him that before them, as before all the rest of the world, he was *disgraced.*

"Don't you think," put in Stephen softly, "there is legal remedy? That you might place this in other hands? Some shrewd, sagacious, penetrating lawyer might set this straight."

"Don't care for lawyers."

"Neither do I; but it's wonderful the amount of good

they do, although nobody cares for 'em. I know just the man you want; he'd ferret out a mystery and clear a client, or forfeit his professional honour there and then. Never been known to fail,—he's a clever one is Coke O'Connor!"

"I shall only be plunging myself into embarrassment I cannot meet. Where is the money to come from for lawyer's fees? I shall just contrive to live, and that is all."

"Well, of course it isn't my place to interfere or to advise, but I do so feel for you! We have been such good friends, I cannot resist it even at the risk of seeming officious. If I stood in your place, I should draw out that four hundred,—I don't really think they deserve the use of it after treating you like this,—and I would place it at O'Connor's disposal, in moderation, to draw upon towards clearing you; and, take my word for it, but he'd do it!"

There was quite a green, ghastly sort of glitter in the eyes, under influence of his interest and profound sympathy.

"No," said Mr. Percival firmly; "it is not worth taking any trouble about. I am quite satisfied upon coming through scathless. I have never yet had occasion to lean upon literature, but I see no just cause or impediment why I should not."

At this juncture Mr. Miles was summoned to the board-room, and shaking hands, he hurried off. George Percival turned to Andrew Wilson with his last word in the London and Olympian,—

"I shall not continue in Queen Street now. I must look out for some more modest home, and you will come and see me, when we will consider ways and means. Don't be down-hearted; there is One above who witnesses all!"

Thus he tried to comfort that other, whose heart he knew was heavier even than his own, and the old man's nerveless hand dropped the pen with which he had made feint to write, and his lip quivered with emotion. At his time of life this blow fell doubly severe, and to him, more than it might have done to many, it represented a grievous loss.

END OF VOL. I.